

# アクセル・ワールド

紅の暴風姫

02

川原 碓  
イラスト/HIMA

accel world 02

アクセル・ワールド  
- 暴風の魔女 -  
川原 碓

電撃文庫

アクセル・ワールド 02  
紅の暴風姫



川原 碓  
イラスト/HIMA  
デザイン/ビィビィ

"U, UWA..."

HARUYUKI

A young boy at the bottom  
of his school's social caste

"YOU'RE  
PRETTY  
CUTE,  
HARUYUKI  
ONII-CHAN!"

SAITOU  
TOMOKO  
A "WIT'S SISTER" LOST IN  
THE ONE OF HAVING FAMILY





"...OH, NOT  
GOING  
TO RUN?  
AIN'T  
THAT  
SOME  
GUTS"

SCARLET  
RAIN

A RED AVATAR  
WHO CHALLENGED  
HARUYUKI TO A DUEL



# TAKUMU

HARUYUKI'S CHILDHOOD FRIEND  
AND TAG PARTNER CONTROLLER  
OF THE DUEL AVATAR CYAN PILE

"Eh..."

# CHIYURI

HARUYUKI'S  
CHILDHOOD FRIEND

IMP...  
IMPOSSIBLE  
THAT'S  
ABSOLUTELY  
IMPOSSIBLE

"YOU CAN  
CREATE A  
COPY  
OF THAT  
GAME AND  
INSTALL  
IT RIGHT?  
GIVE IT  
TO ME  
TOO,  
THAT WAY  
I'LL ALSO  
BECOME A  
BURST  
LINKER"



"KU.....  
KURUYUKIHIME  
SENPAI!!"

SILVER  
CROW

HARUYUKI'S  
DUEL AVATAR

# HARUYUKI is the...

"Pink Pig"  
in the  
Umesato Junior  
High School's  
Local Area  
Network.



ハルユキ@  
『学内ローカルネット』の  
『ピンクのブタ』

"Haruyuki Arita"  
in the  
Real World.



ハルユキ@  
『現実世界』の  
有田春雪

"Silver Crow"  
in the  
Accelerated  
World.



ハルユキ@  
『加速世界』の  
『シルバー・クロウ』

# アクセル・ワールド 02 紅の暴風姫

川原 碓  
イラスト／HIMA  
デザイン／ビィビィ



- 黒雪姫(クロユキヒメ)=梅郷中学の副生徒会長。清楚伶俐なお嬢様。その素性は誰に包まれている。学内アバターは自作プログラムの『黒掲羽蝶』。デュエルアバターは『黒の王』『ブラック・ロータス』。
- ハルユキ=有田春雪(アリタ・ハルユキ)。梅郷中学一年。いじめられっ子で太り気味。ゲームは得意だが、内向的。学内アバターは『ピンクのブタ』。デュエルアバターは『シルバー・クロウ』。
- チユリ=倉鴨千百合(クラシマ・チユリ)。ハルユキの幼馴染。お節介焼きな元氣娘。学内アバターは『銀色の猫』。
- タクム=猪拓武(マユズミ・タクム)。ハルユキ、チユリとは幼少期からの知り合い。剣道が得意。デュエルアバターは『アン・バイル』。
- トモコ=齐藤朋子(サイトウ・トモコ)。ハルユキの家に預けられた少女。ハルユキを『兄』と呼んで懐いてくる。クッキーを焼くのが趣味。

- 
- ニューロリンカー=脳と量子無線接続し、映像や音声など、あらゆる五感をサポートする携帯端末。
  - 学内ローカルネット=梅郷中学内に構築されたローカルエアリネットワーク。出席確認や授業などに利用され、梅郷中の生徒は常時接続が義務となっている。
  - グローバル接続=世界中のネットと接続する行為。梅郷中学内ではグローバル接続は禁止されており、その代わりに学内ローカルネットが提供されている。
  - ブレイン・バースト=黒雪姫からハルユキに転送されたニューロリンカー内のアブリケーション。
  - デュエルアバター=ブレイン・バースト内で対戦する際に操るプレイヤーの仮想体。
  - 軍團=レギオン。複数のデュエルアバターで形成される、古領エア拡大と利権確保を目的とする集団のこと。各々、『純色の七王』がレギオンマスターを担っている。
  - 領土戦争時間=毎週土曜の夕方に設けられている、特別ルールのバトル時間。通常の1対1の格闘戦ではなく、レベル不問、同数対同数の団体戦が行われる。
  - エリア支配=『領土戦争時間』内で平均勝率五十パーセントを上回ることによってシステムに認められる特権。支配した領土内では、ニューロリンカーをグローバル接続していても『対戦』を拒否できるなど特権が与えられている。
  - 通常対戦フィールド=ブレイン・バーストのノーマルバトル(1対1格闘)を行うフィールドのこと。現実ながらのスペックを持つが、システムはあくまで一昔前の格闘ゲームレベルのもの。
  - 無制限中立フィールド=レベル4以上のデュエルアバターのみが許可されるハイ・プレイヤー向けのフィールド。『通常対戦フィールド』とは段違いのゲームシステムが構築されており、その自由度は次世代VRMMOにも全くひけを取らない。
  - 強化外装=エンハンスト・アーマメント。デュエルアバターが所有する武器や防具などのアイテムのこと。初期装備として最初からクレジットされている。レベルアップボーナスとして獲得する、『無制限中立フィールド』内の『ショップ』で購入する、などで入手可能。

▶▶ accel World 02

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# Prologue

Haruyuki just stared at the steel hole with six counterclockwise spirals with his pig avatar's eyes.

There was nothing in the surrounding space. White floor and walls. A huge room sealed with a white ceiling.

In the center of the room floated a steel-blue, large automatic pistol. The slide with hairlines, the grip carved with checker rings, all showing overwhelming weight and density, sent out a cold feeling, but of course it's not real. The reason you wouldn't be able to tell the maker or modeler's name is, it is just a substitute Haruyuki made with randomly selected polygon gun parts.

But it can shoot. With that intention, it pointed between the eyes of Haruyuki's avatar who stood just 20 meters away.

After referring to the book manuals to create this virtual reality training application, on his first dive, Haruyuki was very disappointed with the dull white room. He really wanted the setting to be the roof of a high rise building, and the pistol held by a dark suited hitman, but making that kind of scenario would be too much for a poor middle school student gamer.

If he asked his upperclassman and mentor for help, no matter what kind of set, it would be easily built. However, Haruyuki did not do that. He was afraid of her asking why he would do this kind of beginner training at this time. The result, was an eye irritatingly pure white room with just one brusque handgun floating, an ultra dull substitute.

But, after actually using it, it might be better this way.

Because there was nothing aside from himself other than the gun. This made him only have to concentrate on the gun muzzle.

The pink pig avatar squatted, extended both hands slightly, and Haruyuki earnestly stared at the black hole.

He lost the feeling of time. He could not remember how many minutes he had been in that position. This application's specification is very simple. After diving and saying "Start", with a

five second countdown, the pistol will automatically aim at Haruyuki, and from that instant on, it will randomly fire within 30 minutes.

Of course, in the real world nothing could be done and he would die, but this is a virtual space made within the Neuro Linker. At the instant he sees the handgun muzzle flare, if he reacts within the shortest time, he would be able to dodge it, since he already checked the bullet speed and distance.

However, the problem is the he has no idea when the gun muzzle will flare within the 30 minutes. Different from the virtual squash game, there is no information provided like reading the ball's path and timing. The only thing he could do, was to open his eyes wide, and keep up his concentration.

However that is a difficult thing. He had no faith in his long term concentration. A month earlier when he started this training, after just two or three minutes he relaxed, and started playing «Senpai Album» in his mind with a small idle smile, so he was shot without mercy by the unseen hitman.

But for Haruyuki, since this is a self made application, he perversely continued the training.

Since the opponent is just one immovable pistol. In that «Field» - veteran fighters use many fearsome skills to continually fight for 30 minutes of «Duel», compared to that, this can be said to be an easy thing. In Haruyuki's plan, one month later the number of handguns would be increased to five. However, he is currently having a hard time with just one shot from the single gun.

No talent. He understood that from the start.

However, if training cannot help him improve, then that would mean the «Top» - next to that person, will be forever denied to him.

‘Shit. Shittt. I have to become faster and stronger. For that person. To continue being that person's partner.’

The haste in Haruyuki's heart, became noise that made the avatar's extremities tense.

Then, as if it was waiting for that - .

Click, with that metallic sound the trigger moved. The hammer hit

the firing pin. At the same time the slide was blown back, orange flash blew from the muzzle.

“A...!!”

Haruyuki did a full jump to the right.

However his reaction was a bit slow, the bullet that flew in with a roar hit a point between his left cheek and ear.

He was blown away as if being hit by a huge hammer, bouncing many times on the white floor, and the intense pain that hit him made him scream.

“A... uaaaa...!!”

His two short hands holding his face, he continued screaming as he rolled on the floor.

This application, was installed with an illegal patch from the net, rendering the default pain absorber in the Neuro Linker useless. On top of that, if the gain for pain was set high enough, shock equal to being hit by a real gun would be applied to the diver.

“A... a...!!”

With tears falling, and full body convulsions, Haruyuki thrashed about on the floor. This is the third time he tasted this pain today. One month after the training started, he can no longer remember how many times total this had happened. However many times he got hit, he could not seem to get used to it. Putting it another way, he had already got used to the mid level pain quickly, so it's mostly the upper limit of pain now.

However due to that harmful effect, eventually the Neuro Linker will detect the abnormality in Haruyuki's brain waves and activate the safety, automatically canceling full dive. This is a hardware function, so it could not be easily cracked. This time too, he reached that threshold, and suddenly with a ‘Butsun’ sound effect, the white room disappeared from his eyes.

The feeling of weight changed its axis. From the deep darkness, stretching out radially, the view of reality appeared.

Tears appeared from his real eyes. In his distorted view, was the familiar male toilet single person stall's blue-grey door.

In the current situation, he could have full dive from his classroom since there are no more people playing tricks on him, but it would be a big incident for his teacher to discover him using this dangerous program, and, aside from that, there was a reason that he must use the toilet when using the training application. The left over feeling from the incredible pain, and the shock of instant return from full dive confused his nerves, things wavered in front of his eyes - or so he thought, then he was hit with a feeling of his stomach contents going up.

“...a.”

Haruyuki held his mouth, changed his seat from the toilet cover to the floor, and turned to lift up the toilet seat cover.

Dangerously just in time, the reverse flow from his digestive tracks was pushed back where it belonged. After many dry heaves, he extended his weak right hand and pushed the button on the wall.

He felt the flow of water splash on his face, but he did not have the strength to stand up, so he just left his face above the toilet.

Tears that welled up dripped into the moving water and were swallowed up.

It was not just because of intense pain and throwing up. Despair at his own worthlessness, Haruyuki ground his teeth and his shoulders shook.

This training, was just trying to improve his beginner reaction level. In «Duels», depending on the opponent, some held firearms in both hands and showered him with many rounds in one second. Even so, after one month, his dodge rate had only improved by about 20% or 30%.

Slowly getting stronger is fine, that person said.

However deep in those eyes, was there actual disappointment, Haruyuki could not put this fear out of his mind.

Haruyuki accelerated his thoughts with the secret function in the Neuro Linker, obtained by the «Brain Burst» duel fighting game that used half real stages, and became a member of its players called «Burst Linker», three months have passed.

Back then, the Duel Avatar that Haruyuki controlled, «Silver Crow»

has the one and only «Flight Ability», a huge advantage that allowed him continuous fast attacks. He reached level 2 in merely about one week, and one month later obtained level 3, believing that he might become the real hero in this world.

However, that was just a moment of glory before flight also being his weakness was discovered. Flight meant that you were also in the full view of the enemy. For long ranged attackers, that is, high speed precision attacks where tracking the bullet path is hard, he could no longer show off.

The result was a long road to finally reaching level 4. Their current goal, to expand the Legion «Nega Nebulas» territory of control was not going well, right now they have to work hard to just control the surroundings near the school.

Territory, that is the area under the control of a Legion, is determined by a «Territory Battle Time» every Saturday evening, it is a no level limit, same number group fight, the system will recognize the winner as the group who maintain an average of 50% wins. Under the Legion's territory, even if its members' Neuro Linker is connected to the Global Net, they are given the privilege to refuse «Duel».

However the result of Silver Crow's abilities being analyzed was that the enemy teams who came to attack them, always included a high level anti-air duel avatar, which sealed Haruyuki's easy flight. With that, «Silver Crow» became merely a weak close range melee fighter. His winning rate lowered, and was forced to be continually covered by his team members «Cyan Pile» and «Black Lotus».

That is why he does this training.

If he can dodge at least half of the anti-air attacks, then he can find the attacker's position, and fight back with high powered attack from a rapid descent. This is the application he made while thinking that, but the result was not as he'd expected. If he cannot dodge a bullet from a known firing location, how can he dodge anti-air attacks hidden by obstacles in the «Duel Field»?

That person did not seem to show impatience or frustration. On the other hand, she gently encouraged him after his many unsightly losses in territory battles.

However the disappointment that must be building up in her, Haruyuki could not stop himself from dreading it.

- It will eventually, come down.

At that time, he was shocked to notice himself thinking like that. If he disappointed that person more than this, it would be better if everything ended. This escaping side of him showing up due to old habit, was little by little, but surely continuing to grow in the bottom of his heart.

He thought he had changed. When he accepted Brain Burst, the instant he became Burst Linker, he believed that he was no longer his previous self.

But, isn't it the same after all? School or virtual battle field, no matter where he goes, is he destined to become the lowest losing group?

While his round, soft and flabby body huddled in the toilet single person stall, Haruyuki shut his eyes as negative thoughts ran through his mind. With his throat still hurting from the burn by stomach acid, he desperately tried to push out a sound.

“...Even so... I...”

However, he could not voice what's ahead. Right now he does not have enough strength to say that to his losing self.

With the after school chime sounding directly through the local net, Haruyuki muttered without making a sound.

‘- I want to become stronger.’

‘I want to become stronger.’

# Chapter 1

“Welcome home, Onii-chan!”

When he got home, took off his shoes, and ploddingly walked half way down the hall to his room, he heard that sound coming from his left side, the direction of living room.

Haruyuki automatically responded with a slur.

“...I am back...”

He walked another one, two steps, then, on the third step he suddenly put on the brakes.

‘- Huh?’

‘What was that just now?’

In Haruyuki’s awareness, for Arita Haruyuki’s 13 years and 10 months of life from birth up till now, he should be an only child. Instead of feeling displeasure, he was supposed to be thankful for being lucky, was he actually unconsciously very lonely, and started hearing things?

Even so, it would not be ‘Onii-chan’. Even in a cute girl’s voice. Is this an urban legend of «Imouto» or what?

While Haruyuki was having self doubts in an unnatural pose, he again heard an improbable sound.

‘Funfuun’, kind of humming. Pitter-patter kind of light slipper sounds. Not just those, somehow a sweet fragrant smell too. Illusion... smell? Do such words exist?

He dropped his school bag from his shoulder, turned 180 degrees, and then stiffly walked towards the living room.

Then he saw a mirage too.

At the left side upon entry, usually, its original purpose was not put to much use, at that kitchen space.

Around 10 years old. A surprisingly slim and slender body, wearing some elementary school uniform that consisted of a white blouse and a navy blue skirt with shoulder straps, and above those was a pink apron. Reddish hair with small pigtails on both sides, under a smooth and round forehead, the face could only be said to be «innocent». Maybe of slight mixed blood, the milky skin was covered with small freckles, and the large eyes were reddish-brown. To say the full impression in one word - .

‘...Angel? Spelled like that?’

Having lost his thinking ability, Haruyuki was just staring while spaced out, the girl glanced at him then said with a cute smile.

“I am baking cookies right now, please wait a bit more, Onii-chan.”

“...Uwaa!”

Haruyuki did a delayed scream, then hid his round body behind the living room door. While unable to understand the situation, he just poked the top part of his face out.

The girl tilted her head in wonder, soon after she gave another smile, and turned around to peek into the oven. Her red hair with two pigtails swung softly, and shone from the winter light coming from a window.

After coming this far, Haruyuki finally determined that this was not a mirage.

For daydream, or delusion, the girl’s existence was way too real. This means - this could only be a malicious program in the Neuro Linker. Ultra high detailed model layered on Haruyuki’s view, information like sounds and smells were fed to him. It is unknown who did this imitation for whatever reason - .

Since, there could not be an «Imouto».

There was no need to be afraid of a polygon fake. While Haruyuki was thinking that in his mind, he stepped into the kitchen, and extended his right hand to the «Imouto» who looked up smiling.

Then, he pinched the freckled cheek, and pulled.

For the Neuro Linker that communicated with human consciousness using quantum signals, at sight and sound level limit, virtual reality

that's hard to tell from reality can be made. Due to the limits in memory and CPU power, creating the whole human is the best it can do.

However, for the other senses, especially the sense of touch, it is hard to digitize, or research is slow. Something like a «Human cheek», the skin texture, muscle resistance, and contraction in reaction type of complicated virtual sense is impossible to perfectly recreate. So, if he did that, then his fingers will return a lifeless gum like feeling -

“Wh, wha ar yo doin ~”

“...Uu, uwaaaaaa!?”

Haruyuki shouted, let go of his hand, jumped back and his behind hit the refrigerator.

It's perfect.

Soft, smooth, also young and vivacious, that can only be said to be perfect «feeling of pulling a 10 year old girl's cheek» - up till now he had never experienced this - occurred on his fingers.

While being stared at by the suddenly outraged girl with round cheeks, Haruyuki extended his right hand towards the Neuro Linker at his neck, removed the lock and pulled it right off.

From his view, time, calendar, application icons and AR information disappeared.

The girl did not disappear.

‘Haruyuki, sorry.’

That starting message from his mother, he finally noticed that it was left in the home server, he put the Neuro Linker back on, and stood there listening.

[ - sorry, but we will be taking care of a relative's child for two or three days. You know right, Nakano's Saitou-san, my cousin. He went on an emergency overseas trip, like I just said, I too will be going to Shanghai today. I will return three days from now, please look after that girl. If anything happens, send an email, see you.]

His mother, Arita Saya, worked for an American bank in the dealing

department. Every night she wouldn't be home till around midnight, once in a while she flew overseas and left him home for a few days and things. For that, how many parts for work and how many parts vacationing with the man she went out with, he did not know. If the divorce 7 years ago wasn't because his father cheated on her, Haruyuki would have thought that it was strange that he was left in her care.

So, since Haruyuki was in elementary school, he was continually left in the care of the Kurashima house two floors down in the same apartment complex - that is Chiyuri's home.

Chiyuri's mother and father always kindly welcomed him, on the other hand, if they had shown being bothered even once, he would have felt very bitter. Without any place to go, he would have grown up and become a child ten times more bullied than he was now.

While thinking about those, Haruyuki peeked at Saitou-san's child moving busily in the kitchen.

After the oven timer gave a light sound, the girl opened its door and pulled out a metal tray. A sweet smell drifted by strongly. It seems the source of the fragrance were cookies.

She carefully moved with tongs around ten cookies onto a large plate covered with cooking paper, then she relaxed with a sigh.

Holding the plate with both hands, she turned around, and looked up at Haruyuki.

“Umm... sorry for using the kitchen without permission. I thought Haruyuki onii-chan would be hungry when he returned... so...”

A much lower volume voice than earlier, Haruyuki thought.

‘I see, this child too, felt uneasy about whether the «onii-chan» she was left in care of showed a bothered face or not. I am so helpless. Even though the opponent is a girl I met for the first time, there's no reason for me who is older to feel scared.’

While feeling some pain inside, Haruyuki tried his best to put up a smile and said.

“Th... thank you. I am starving.”

Doing so, the girl too, smiled happily like ice melting.

“Umm, I am, Saitou Tomoko. Elementary school 5th year. We haven’t seen each other for many years, so you might have forgotten... I think onii-chan and me are second cousins. Umm... I am unworthy, but please look after me.”

While holding the plate, she bowed, that made Haruyuki’s heart beat rocket up and his sweat glands open wide.

However he soon remembered his earlier thought, and managed to return a barely understandable greeting.

“Yes, err, I... I am Arita Haruyuki, h-here also, p-please take care of me, Saitou-san.”

The instant reply of ‘Tomoko is fine’ and smile caused Haruyuki to desperately pull his thoughts going far away back to normal.

Nakano’s Saitou-san, about that, all he remembered was having this kind of relative. For a parent’s cousin, that was normal.

“...Y, you are also a single child?”

Hearing that, Tomoko nodded.

“There is just father and me in my family. He suddenly had to go on a business trip, I said I was fine by myself, but he was worried. Earlier, he brought me here from school, and then left for Narita.”

Tomoko answered while placing the plate of cookies on the table, which confirmed something for Haruyuki.

“Ah, then, you haven’t met my mother.”

“No. I have only been given an instant key for onii-chan’s house.”

That was very fortunate. If it was that mother, she would have shown Tomoko a 100% bothered face without hesitation.

- However.

‘Then, if it’s like that. That means for the next three days, I will be living alone with this girl.’

‘No no, you don’t need to panic, you fool. The opponent is just an elementary 5th year child. She and I are a whole two years apart... Two years... Whole? Is that whole?’

Without noticing Haruyuki's panic attacks, Tomoko said 'Please wait till it cools', then after another smile, turned around. She quickly washed the bowls and things in the sink, at the same time boiling some water, and after just a few minutes, she returned with a tea tray. Clearly, she's already more familiar with this kitchen than Haruyuki.

Girls are incredible, after thinking that, Haruyuki shook his head. A child, the opponent is just a child.

However the cookies, were so delicious that they could be sold just like that in a shop.

After eating nine of the so-so big cookies, Haruyuki wondered how many years it had been that he had eaten someone's handmade sweets, and sipped the tea Tomoko poured for him.

On the other side of the table, his red-headed second cousin blew on her cup with a serious face. Each of those gestures, were simple and cute, just looking at it gave him a warm and snug feeling.

"...Thanks for the food. They were... d-delicious."

Haruyuki somehow managed to say that normally, it made Tomoko show a huge smile of relief.

"Really, I am glad! Since you did not say anything, I was worried."

"S-sorry. I was eating in a daze..."

"That's true."

With ufufu laughter, she extended her hand in a half-raised posture, and took a cookie crumb that was stuck to Haruyuki's cheek.

Then she threw it in her mouth, and laughed again.

Zing, noticing a strange sound effect in his brain, Haruyuki wiped around his mouth in panic.

"W, well then, err... th, that is, what should we do now? Wa, want to play games? I have mountains of them, a collection of games starting from 40 years ago..."

After saying so, he remembered that most of them are the bloody and hellish graphic type.

However fortunately, Tomoko smiled and lightly shook her head.

“Well, I don’t play too many games. I have a bit of trouble with Full Dive...”

“I, I see.”

Haruyuki looked at her after saying so, on her small neck above the top blouse button, he belatedly noticed that the current era's absolutely necessary social tool, the Neuro Linker, was not there.

Indeed, there are families who avoid having elementary school student wearing the Neuro Linker permanently. The unlimited Global Net is a hothouse for many different kind of crime. Even with the parental control functions, it’s difficult to block 100% of the harmful information.

If they only use sight and sound mode for daily school classes, it’s reasonable for them to be scared of full dive that cut all five senses. Then what should they do, while desperately thinking, his eyes finally stopped at the large panel monitor in the living room, Haruyuki pointed to that.

“Th... then, want to watch a movie on that? Even for old 2D software, they are pretty fun.”

However, this time too, Tomoko shook her head slightly, and shyly said.

“Umm... Instead of that, can we talk? I want to learn about onii-chan’s middle school.”

She then stood up, walked around the table, and sat beside him.

A milk like sweet smell tickled his nose, his long nurtured anti-female field activated at that moment, and Haruyuki moved back in reaction. His chair leaned, about to make him fall to the left, he flapped both arms to balance himself.

Tomoko laughed while looking at Haruyuki returning to his original position with a bang.

“Onii-chan, you have a pretty cute side to you.”

‘- Uwaa.’

While blowing bubbles from his mouth, Haruyuki lowered himself deeper into the bathtub.

On his mother's whim, the Arita house bathroom is very big. The bathtub is big too, so Haruyuki's huge body fit in it with no problem and he was able to extend his hands. He breathed in a big whiff of the bathwater soap scented steam, kept it in his lungs, then exhaled it slowly.

Even though his speech was awkward, his rare long speech made his throat hurt a bit. Along with the curry rice dinner Tomoko cooked, he calculated that he had spent four hours total speaking. He was strangely impressed that he had so many stories to talk about from his everyday life.

In the end, starting with the Umesato middle school's different systems, various episodes with his two childhood friends, to his «most important person», that is the black clothed upperclassman as well, were completely talked about. The only things he did not mention, was the bullied incident that continued till a few months ago, and - the «other world» related information.

To those talks that he thought certainly were not interesting, Tomoko seriously listened, and once in a while laughed with a comment.

Is this the feeling of having a sister? Haruyuki tried to get a hold on it.

At the same time, he hated himself for maintaining a certain doubt.

It's just - too perfect. One day after returning home from school, a little sister suddenly appeared, baked cookies and made curry, and even used the killer move of 'Wanting to talk with onii-chan'. Beyond that, they will be living with just two of them for three days?

Haruyuki was not brought up in such a pure way that he could accept this rare event that fell on him.

However, even if this incident had a back side to it, who would have done it and for what reason? And how should he go about to check it?

After thinking for a while, Haruyuki raised his top half from the bath, and took the aluminum silver Neuro Linker from the corner

rack.

Even though it was water proof, he wiped his neck of water just in case, and put it on from behind. The U-shaped parts swung together, and locked around his neck.

After turning it on, the start-up logo shone in front of his eyes, and after twenty or so seconds of brain connection check, the virtual desktop opened. Moving his right hand finger quickly, he opened the Arita home server window.

In the data storage, Haruyuki thought of going into the family album, but he hesitated. In recent years they haven't taken any family photos, but in there before Haruyuki became so rounded - when his father and mother were still happily together, there were lots of their family pictures. Those things, he would rather die than look at.

Going back up to the home server lobby, he opened the connection to the external net.

A few solid access gates popped up. These were all of the Arita relatives' home nets. Of course you cannot fish for data as you like, but you can leave messages or check the relatives' public schedules.

However, the access gate with «Nakano's Saitou-san» home net did not exist. Most of the home net top pages only showed recent reports of family gathering pictures, he checked them out, but the only connections were from his mother's family, a few uncles and aunts, it did not cover their cousins.

For a moment, Haruyuki looked away from the desktop towards the bathroom door and listened. He could hear slight sounds from the panel TV in the living room. Tomoko was probably still watching family oriented variety shows. Since she strongly urged him to take a bath first, he should finish quickly and go out. If the reason for his long bath was due to doubt if she was his real second cousin, even more so.

He looked back to the desktop again, the access gate that was floating in the center - his mother's family home net, he opened it.

He ignored the family picture taken in a mountain village, and clicked on the gate connecting to the internal net. Of course a login confirmation appeared, Haruyuki quickly moved his fingers.

There, he entered the ID and password he got from mother. Since this access will be logged, if the other side asked his mother about the login reason, he would be in big trouble after his mother found out that he stole her ID, but he did not think that his village born grandparents would check their home net access logs.

But of course, he must quickly finish what he had to do. Haruyuki hurriedly dived into his mother's family home net, and opened the album folder.

He was overwhelmed by the number of pictures from all the years, but he found the era and number of people from the folder data. If his vague memory was right, five years ago for his grandfather's birthday, a lot of Arita family gathered. He might have greeted «Nakano's Saitou-san» at that time. If it's like that, then five years or so old Tomoko should be there.

His search was soon over, and a few thumbnails were stacked.

He flicked each with his finger.

Not this, not this either... ah, around here. The next one was bingo.

“Onii-chan♪”

Suddenly, a song like voice came from his right side, Haruyuki turned his head in reaction.

Then, he froze with his right finger in the air.

Not sure when, the bathroom door was opened a crack, on the other side, Tomoko peeked in with her face and right shoulder shown.

From the reddish hair head that was warped in a towel, to the slightly shy looking face, then the slender neck and shoulder skin, his view moved down - .

“Wha... wh, wha...”

To Haruyuki who was moving his mouth quickly, Tomoko returned a slightly pink smile.

“Onii-chan, can I join you?”

“To... gether... that...”

“Since, onii-chan is taking so long. I got tired of waiting.”

With an ehehe smile, Tomoko entered the bathroom without waiting for an answer. Haruyuki lowered his body in panic, and shout with his eyes shut tight.

“S, sorry, I am getting out now! I am getting out soon so wait a bit more!!”

“It’s okay, we are second cousins.”

‘It’s absolutely not okay - !!’

While his brain screamed, Haruyuki’s biological optical observation system, that is his eyes, betrayed his command and opened. When the small bare feet on the ivory tiles entered his view, his breath stopped.



Both of his eyes' focus automatically moved up. Surprisingly slender calf drawn with slippery lines. Small round knees and supple lower legs.

The end of the legs were barely covered by a pink bath towel, Haruyuki momentarily thought, 'fool, what are you doing', he blamed himself as his eyes moved further up. The towel covered a body that did not have too many bumps, his eyes moved pass the cloth that could come off at any moment, and saw smooth skin covered a delicate collarbone.

"B... but, please don't stare at me so much."

And finally, the shyly lowered face.

Haruyuki compare that to the large Arita gathering picture shown on his view's left side.

The front line was a group of children including himself. Now, he would not know who was who, but fortunately, the pictures in this era used technology that contain embed data.

Moving his focus, made names appear and disappear in front of the children.

This name, appeared on the 6th person. «Saitou Tomoko».

When he stared at it, the child's face automatically zoomed in, becoming the same size as the Tomoko in front of him.

Five years old then. It is said that girls change, but becoming this face in five years...

No way.

Haruyuki took a deep breath, held it, then let it out.

He faced the girl that said she was his second cousin with a vacant expression, and called with a sad smile.

“Tomoko-chan...”

“What is it, onii-chan?”

“...You, are a «New Burst Linker» right?”

The reaction was immediate and real.

Tomoko's cute face, instantly became blank with a surprised look.

That face probably was dyed red with some other reason than embarrassment, and the right eye jerked.

But what was impressive, was the around 10 year old girl, tilted her head and said with a normal cute voice.

“What, onii-chan, what did you say? Bu..rst? What is that?”

“Tan line.”

Haruyuki replied with a murmur.

“What?”

“Around your neck, there’s a nice tan line. Similar to mine. To that degree, you could not get it unless you often worn it since birth... the Neuro Linker.”

Tomoko - probably not her name girl, covered her neck with both hands. Then, Haruyuki continued.

“There’s a picture from five years ago in my grandfather’s home server. Saitou Tomoko-chan was there... even though I am saying it in this situation, you are 10 times cuter.”

The girl’s face jerked again, showing a complex expression.

Eventually that multi-faceted face, settled on a sulky face that was one light year from the naive face till now.

“Geesh.”

With her hands on her waist around the bath towel, she clicked her tongue strongly.

“I checked the family album here. To dig around in your grandfather’s home net, you have too much distrust.”

The sharp dig made his eyes spin, but Haruyuki somehow managed to retort.

“Y... you are too unreasonable. You probably faked an email from Saitou-san to my mother, what would you do if my mother checked with them?”

“The email and call from your mother’s Neuro Linker to Saitou-san were all interrupted and redirected to me. It took three days of preparation.”

“That... must be hard work...”

While holding the edge of the bathtub, Haruyuki let out an amazed sound.

To put a virus in someone’s Neuro Linker, it could only be done with a cable direct connect. Probably this girl checked his mother’s movement, and connected their Neuro Linker in the changing room

of the sports gym that his mother frequent.

Of course, having a family member subjected to that did not feel good, but before that, he was impressed. This world has many self proclaimed Linker hackers and wizards, but to leave their safe home and go to the outside for «Social engineering» - meeting others to do offline extreme hacking - there are not many strong ones like that.

Hearing Haruyuki's words containing admiration, the girl's face showed a strong smile.

Seeing that, Haruyuki continued to voice his guess.

“...For you to go this far, you must be trying to hack my supporter, «that person», that's too naive. For that person, one look and she will know you are a fake, unlike me who took 5 hours. ...I can understand that you cannot win fighting face to face as a Burst Linker... since the opponent is that «Black Lotus»...”

‘Would you hurry and leave’, while thinking that he said up to that point -

At that moment.

The girl's presence, again changed sharply.

Her eyes shot out strong light, with a hint of red like her hair. Her glossy lips twisted into a bend, showing pure white teeth.

An expression that can only be described as arrogance looked down at Haruyuki, and the girl said in a low voice.

“...Hey you, what did you say?”

“...Eh? Th, that is... even if you challenge her face to face...”

“Cannot win? Me? That's why I sneak around and go about this bothersome real hack?”

‘- That's not it?’

At the same time Haruyuki asked that question with his eyes, the girl's right hand moved, and took off the towel that was around her head. She threw that towel to the floor with a loud thud, then pointed her index finger at him.

In the foggy air, he seemed to see that her near deep red hair stood

up on ends. With her short hair waving like flames, the girl let out a threatening voice.

“It’s too bothersome, I will force you to listen to me. I will have you pay dearly for looking down on this «Scarlet Rain»-sama, wait right there till I get my Neuro Linker!!”

With her index finger waving, she stuck out her thumb, then turned it down and wiggled it, turning around in a big move.

Then, her right foot that took a step, stepped on the towel that she threw earlier, and slipped.

“Nyaa!?”

A high pitched scream. Looking at the girl falling in an almost perfect back flip, Haruyuki also shouted.

“Uwaa!?”

He hurriedly opened both arms, and caught the girl before she hit the bathtub’s edge. However his feet slipped inside the bathtub, so he also fell backward.

Splash.

With a huge splash sound, a water pillar went up high, that blew up most of the bath towel.

When Haruyuki hit the wall behind, he shut his eyes to wait for the pain to pass, then lifted his head to check the situation.

He was sitting in the wide bathtub.

A red haired girl was riding his flabby stomach as cushion. Her slender body was held by both of his arms.

And also, both of them were completely naked.

“U, uwaaaaa!?”

Haruyuki shouted that, then,

“Ugyaaa - !!”

The girl’s scream overwrote his shout. She stumbled around, then from her foot’s bounce on Haruyuki’s stomach, she somehow

managed to escape out of the bathtub. She picked up the bath towel on the floor, fled to the change area in high speed, then showed just her face.

“...I will beat you to death.”

When he heard her footsteps head towards the living room, Haruyuki thought in a daze.

‘- I saw and touched.’

‘- Not that. That girl was probably an assassin from the one of the six kings. With that word and action, she will probably be back later to challenge him to a duel.’

Then, should he remove the Neuro Linker to prevent that? However, she is probably an enemy they will meet again, so it might be better to obtain information early. Since he is just level 4, losing once won’t cost him too many points, also - since the opponent is just a child, he might not lose that easily.

With about 80% of his thinking processes in confusion, the remaining 20% reached that conclusion, then the name that girl said earlier pop up in his brain.

«Scarlet Rain». He probably hasn’t heard of it. For the color circle, it’s probably «Long range red» type, with that, he thought she might be a Burst Linker belonging to the red legion. He would find that out when they duel, but he wanted a bit more information.

It will take some time for the girl to put on her Neuro Linker, start the OS, and finish the quantum connection check. While he sat in the bathtub, he issued a voice command.

“Command. Voice Call. Number 01.”

At that moment, [Voice call for registered address number 01. Is that okay?], that holo dialogue appeared in front of his eyes. He instantly answered ‘Yes’.

With two rings, the opponent answered.

“It’s me. What’s wrong, Haruyuki-kun, calling at this time.”

With that smooth voice, a background sound like musical accompaniment of splashing water was heard.

‘Ah, is senpai also taking a bath...’ While thinking that and other things, Haruyuki talked to the person he called - one of the strongest Burst Linkers, Black King «Black Lotus», also known as Kuroyukihime.

“Sorry for calling this late. I want you to tell me about something...”

“Oh, what is it?”

“Well, senpai, do you know of a Burst Linker called «Scarlet Rain»?”

The answer to his question, was a bit long silence.

“...A, ah, what’s wrong?”

“...Nothing, sorry. You are seriously asking that right?”

“Seriously... of course. I won’t make a prank call at this time.”

“I see. Hmm, this should be my omission. I used the common calling only so haven’t told you their names. However, «Silver Crow», you are also a bit short on study.”

“Eh...? What, does that mean...”

Haruyuki’s tilted head heard running footsteps in the hall, on top of that was Kuroyukihime’s cool voice.

“- «Scarlet Rain». That person is also called «Immobile Fortress» and «Bloody Storm»... is the second generation Red King.”

...Huh?

In a daze, with both eyes and mouth wide open, Haruyuki’s thoughts stopped.

Right after, the bathroom door was pulled open hard, and the red haired girl again appeared.

She must be really furious, since she only wore underwear on top and bottom. However she did not seem to be hiding anymore, her pure white body was held high, and arms crossed in front of her chest.

He moved his view on reaction, and noticed the only other thing she had on other than underwear, then stared at it. Around her slender neck, a glossy pure red shone.

The girl showing a violent smile, shouted with a cute yet forceful voice.

“Burst Link!!”

Viiiiii!!

- That familiar, yet always hair-raising sound reverberated in his world.

Instantly, his five senses were cut, in the darkness «HERE COMES A NEW CHALLENGER!!» words burned. Right after, his view returned.

However, there was no longer his home bathroom with ivory makeup panels. Unbelievable that it was high up in a apartment floor, it was a huge open space.

Haruyuki had already accelerated his thought with the Neuro Linker, and fully dived into the virtual world created by the duel fighting game application «Brain Burst». The surrounding world, was made up of images from Social Camera Net all over Japan, a virtual «Duel Field».

However, normal residences including Haruyuki's home did not have a social camera, so this was supplemented with guess work - that is the software built it up with the structure. This time, the apartment was returned to while it was being built. The concrete littered floor had steel pillars here and there.

In this bleak space, Haruyuki and the girl faced each other in their real form for about half of a second.

However soon, both their body color and shape started changing. Towards their other self, the combat use «Duel Avatar».

Haruyuki's round limbs were covered with silver from the tips and at the same time twisted smaller and smaller. What appeared was silver armor covered robotic hands. The change reached his body, and his stomach shrunk by more than half in one go. When the slender metallic body was finished, the white light covered his head, and became a slippery round mirror helmet.

While he was transforming to his duel avatar «Silver Crow», Haruyuki continued to stare at the girl a few meters in front of him.

The doll like delicate arms and legs were covered by a deep red shine. As the light circle moved up, the places it passed were transformed to a ruby colored armor. The flat stomach and chest were also changed to be covered by dark grey and ruby mixed half transparent armor, and with a last flash, an android like head appeared.

A mask that only had bead like eyes. Front hair shape metal extended from both sides of the head, like pigtail shaped antenna.

The twin pigtails wiggled, and a deep red light shone from both eyes.

‘- This is the «Red King»?’

Haruyuki stood still and looked at the Duel Avatar a few meters in front of him.

Small. Height only around 130cm. For weapon-like items, only a toy-like handgun on the right waist.

“...E, err.”

He unintentionally opened his mouth, and under the mirror helmet, a metallic effect voice leaked out.

“Are you really...”

‘Accelerated world’s only seven level 9 Burst Linker, highest commander of huge legion, one of the «Pure Color Six Kings»?’

He wanted to ask that, at that moment.

Suddenly, the space behind the cute girl avatar became twisted.

Four brusque blocks shining pure red appeared from the void, and warped around the girl’s arms and legs. Then thick armor surrounded her from left and right, fully covering the elegant body.

“What the...”

Haruyuki looked with a daze at the red avatar that became several times bigger than him in one go.

However, the addition of armaments did not stop there.

With low Gon Gon sounds reverberating, huge hexagon pillars,

cylinders, and plates kept appearing behind and connecting. The height soon reached for the ceiling, compared to the panicky retreating Silver Crow, its height was 2 meters more, 3 meters more...

A few seconds later.



When silence finally returned, what stood in front of Haruyuki's eyes, was a tank, or might be a thing better called a fortress.

Like an extension of its original arms, two huge cannons were slowly lifted up, and white steam came from various heat release valves.

In the center of the armor container, two shining red eyes peeked out just a bit.

“...No way...”

At the same time as Haruyuki’s whisper, in front of him in burning font, «FIGHT», shone, then blew apart.

‘I should run away first!!’

That was the first thing Haruyuki thought of, he wanted to turn around and quickly dash away behind, but stopped when he thought that would be dangerous.

The enemy’s type is «Long range red». This huge fortress like duel avatar, no matter how you look at it, is a demon of long distance attacks. In addition to the main cannons on the left and right side, the containers on both shoulders were probably missile pods, and the short tubes in front should be some kind of machine gun.

Against this type of opponent, trying to distance himself would be foolish.

With that determination, he gathered courage to stand still, then the fortress avatar «Scarlet Rain»’s red eyes focused on him.

“...Hmm, not running away. You have guts.”

The metallic yet cute voice, was released by the Red King.

“I, I am so scared that my legs won’t move.”

Haruyuki replied with a pitiful sound, then he desperately looked at the Red King’s different parts.

Normally in games, the strategy against this kind of huge armored boss enemy, is to attack the thin area weak point in a blind spot. Attacking from the front is out of question, left and right is probably covered by those movable main cannons. That leaves right behind. If he could dash at full speed around to the back side.

Unknown if she knew of Haruyuki’s thinking or not, Scarlet Rain laughed.

“You said a cute thing♪ But, you didn’t forget, right?”

“Eh? About... what?”

“That I will...”

Guin! With that sound the right main cannon moved, pointing right at Haruyuki.

“- beat you to death, you hentai[1]!!”

“That was beyond my controlll!!”

While shouting back a reply, Haruyuki kicked the ground hard. He moved towards the enemy's left side at lightning speed, then made a sharp turn for the back side.

Scarlet Rain who turned while chasing Haruyuki, was surprisingly quick for such a huge size, but even so, Silver Crow - is a very specialized speed type duel avatar, so she could not catch up to his dash.

“And you were the one who came into the bathroommm!!”

With another shout while turning, Haruyuki finally saw the enemy's back and rushed forward.

As he had predicted, the back side had large heat releasing fins and vernier like things lined up, but he did not see any armaments. The armor looked thinnest at the connection between the missile pod and fin, his right fist aimed for that - .

‘...Vernier?’

At the same time he thought of that, four black exhaust holes let out fierce jets of flame.

“Uwaa hot -!!”

He had a strong feeling of heat when he was covered by the flames, so he screamed. In his view's upper left, his own HP gauge dropped.

However, Haruyuki did not stop moving forward.

The damage to him, was not an amount to be feared. The metal color Silver Crow has heat attack resistance.

“Fire won't work against this Silver Crow!!”

‘- It's decided.’

While thinking that, Haruyuki put all his strength behind his punch against the back armor in front of him. However.

“It’s not that easy, brat!!”

Fuhahaha, with a roar that he could almost see the words, at the same time the containers on Scarlet Rain’s shoulders opened their covers.

From those, numerous small missiles flew out, Haruyuki opened his eyes wide on seeing that.

‘Wait... here, the building... inside...’

Right after, the concrete ceiling, floor, and steel pillars were all covered by red rose like explosions.

Haruyuki desperately ducked when a missile headed straight for him, it hit the concrete ceiling above his head, breaking it up mesh like, and it started falling.

“No way...”

He dangerously dodged a huge slap of concrete that fell down, it hit near his feet and the floor abruptly sank.

“No way - !!”

With that shout, Haruyuki dashed fiercely. This was no longer the time to worry about keeping distance with the enemy or not. This was the 23rd floor above ground. If he was caught in the collapse, his HP would be gone in an instant.

The originally Haruyuki’s home apartment was now a building with only floor and pillars, so tens of meters ahead he could see the outside space. He jumped around the broken floors and used his fist and head to break falling concrete fragments, while checking the special attack gauge below his HP gauge.

The damage that he dealt and received did not amount to much, but maybe due to the stage destruction points, his gauge was at about 20% with a green shine. With this -

He could fly!!

Haruyuki took a deep breath and exerted force on his shoulders.

On his back, folded metal fins started to make a crisp sound.

With the fins' high frequency vibration, Haruyuki's dash speed also increased.

“Fuooooo - !!”

With that shout, Haruyuki aimed for the grey space coming up in front of him and dived head first.

Haruyuki's home was very high up in the building. That meant, the moment he jumped out from the building, he could see all of the streets from Kouenji to Shinjuku.

The superb panoramic view - was there, but all the buildings were similar to his apartment, becoming stark segments with steel pillars. This is probably the «Weathered» stage. Its properties are: easy to destroy, dusty, and occasional gust blowing...

While thinking of many things, Haruyuki controlled his metallic wings' speed and hovered in the air.

He checked his special attack gauge, there's still a little left. With that, he should be able to fly continuously for three minutes.

He turned around - .

That was about the same time as the huge high-rise building split almost in half and collapsed.

“Ah, ah... My home...”

He whispered unconsciously. Of course that was just polygon data created by the system, but this was the first time his home was destroyed in a «Duel».

“That was reckless.”

While shaking his helmet head, Haruyuki looked down at the rubble mountain that his apartment had become. The Red King seemed to be buried in her own destruction, and could not be seen. At that rate, probably even a fortress avatar won't escape unscratched.

‘What was she thinking’, he shook his head and started to descend, right after.

Haruyuki noticed something and became horrified.

Scarlet Rain's HP gauge - did not decrease. To be exact around 3% was lost, but that could not be called damage.

And then, her special attack gauge, was flashing at 100%.

It would be like that. With the destruction of that huge environmental object, a huge bonus must have been added. That meant, her reckless missile fire, was not to prevent Haruyuki from attacking behind her, nor was she trying to trap him in the destruction...

Suddenly.

From under the rubble, muscle like red light appeared from cracks. At the same time, a sharp shout.

“- «Heat Blast Saturation»!!”

With a sharp squeal and explosion sound, a crimson flame extended from the wreck of the apartment, Haruyuki who saw that screamed.

“Hiaaaa!!”

He moved his right wing as fast as he could, and tried to avoid with a spin dive. However.

The flame was way too huge. He was unable to completely avoid the flame with a diameter about the same as his height, and the wavering hot column touched Silver Crow's left hand, and below his elbow came a burning sound.

His HP gauge lost one fifth, at the same time a non-virtual hot feeling attacked him, but Haruyuki almost did not notice it.

Because, the heat ray that went by him head east of the stage, hit Shinjuku city far away, and blew up everything above 300 meters in that area.

“No way...”

The not sure how many time in this battle, shocked voice leaked from Haruyuki.

While his mouth flapped under the silver face plate, he moved his view to look at his home's wreckage.

At that moment, from the huge hole in the rubble, the Red King's

majesty appeared.

The full body beautiful ruby armor, didn't seem to have a single scratch. The back and lower verniers glowed red from exhaust, and white steam came from the slits on the left cannon.

“...Ooh, he's flying!”

From between the front armor, the Red King's two round eyes looked up at Silver Crow and said in a sing song voice.

“I wanted to try it once, like anti-air cannon fire? In SF movies and others, when they let it all out seems to be very fun.”

Clink.

With that clear metallic sound, the missile containers on both shoulders all opened, the right main cannon was lifted up, and the four machine guns in the front changed angle.

While trembling, a certain anime movie scene played in Haruyuki's brain. A small robotic weapon, trying to infiltrate an enemy fortress filled with anti-air weapons - however, he was shot down like a small bug, and he shouted his lover's name before exploding.

‘Ah, then it would be Kuroyukihime for me. But that's just a nickname. Even though, it's embarrassing to say her real name.’

While repeating escapist thinking, the enemy's main cannon started charging with a rumbling sound. From the containers, around 100 small missiles appeared, their seeker head lenses shining.

Compared to the again full special attack gauge from destroying a city, Haruyuki's own gauge only had less than 5% left. He only had tens of seconds of full strength flight probably. It was not his habit, but he might have to bet on a simple banzai attack in this situation.

“...I have to say this, huge war ship is supposed to be shot down by a single robot, it was decided in the past!”

With a loser like retort, Haruyuki took a dashing form in the air.

“As if a robot piloted by a hentai can be that active, idiot!”

The Red King shouted those very nasty words, then continued with a loud shout.

“ - «Hailstorm Domination»!!”

Giyudoaaaapapapapaundaridaridari, those three attack sounds reverberated, main cannon, missiles, and machine guns fired at the same time.

This is truly, a huge manifestation of «Long range anti-air attack» that Haruyuki was having long time trouble with. The previous week, and the week before that as well, Haruyuki was chased by one tenth of that firepower and was shot down.

Then why did he now, have no wish to give up, or feel any fear?

Since the enemy is so much stronger, he might just be having a ‘so-what’ attitude. However Haruyuki, for once in a long while, his whole body was covered by the heat of his boiling blood. That was, the excitement of «Duel».

“...Zuoriyaa - !!”

With that roar, Haruyuki first dashed to the right in the air, avoiding the main cannon’s high heat beam. If he was directly hit with that, he would be burn to a crisp instantly. The beam dangerously passed by him, this time it opened a huge hole in park tower and NS building.

However, the enemy seemed to have predicted that move. Numerous small missiles came after him from the front with their seeker shining.

Taking a deep breath, Haruyuki started full body ultra high speed movement.

He flew straight and pulled a group of missiles behind him, then did a more than 90 degrees sharp turn. While he wavered from the explosions of missiles that lost their homing target, the next group of missiles closed in, and he again dodged.

He zig zag in the air like an UFO, and left numerous explosions as Silver Crow continued to fly.

Strangely, he could clearly see the missile and machine gun bullet paths. If this was result from the training in that white room, he could not tell.

While doing unlimited high speed flight, Haruyuki felt a strong

resentment against himself.

Why couldn't he do this kind of movement in the weekly territory battle? Why did he always get shot by just one rifle and his legs - no wings shun and he stopped flying? If it was because of pressure, then his one on one fight with the one called «Red King» should be way more fearful.

'- I am this fast. I can fly this way. Then, why in the moment when it matters I was so clumsily hit by bullets? I should be a lot stronger. Become strong, raise my level, then that person...'

"...!"

While he strongly ground his teeth under his helmet, his flight speed slowed just a bit, and the only dodge route trace was missed.



In front of him was the remaining around 30 missiles group. Behind him was the machine gun bullet shower. And below him Scarlet Rain's left main cannon finished charging, and started tracking him.

“Sh... it!”

Haruyuki right kicked the missile that came in front of him. It flew away and blew up. From the reaction, he changed his angle and dived straight below. However, in front of his eyes, the left main cannon's hole waited - .

At that time, a fierce wind blew in the battle field.

It was the «Weathered» stage's geological effect. From the concrete buildings to the ground, a large sand storm blew up, his view was temporarily filled with grey. The surrounding missiles lost their target and exploded one by one.

‘...This is it!!’

Haruyuki opened his eyes, aiming just for the ruby color in the sandstorm, and did a rapid spiral dive.

In the middle of his path, the main cannon's beam passed by, burning just air.

“Oooooo!!”

With that roar, Haruyuki changed his position, the sharp front of his foot moved forward like a spear of light. His all or nothing left kick, aimed between Scarlet Rain's twin missile containers. If this could be a critical hit, there might be a chance for him yet -

- However.

“...!?”

Right before the sword sharp feet hit, the huge fortress avatar broke apart at once.

The containers and main cannons split apart, and the armor plates too opened up all around.

From the center, an elegant girl avatar appeared, and looked up at him.

With an unbelievable speed, she slid one step, and dodged Silver Crow's kick.

Blam! Silver Crow made a big hole on the ground, he fell clumsily, and something was stuck on his helmet. Looking up, he saw a small gun hole. Scarlet Rain's main body, the small girl avatar, held a crimson handgun in her right hand, and ‘hold up’ Haruyuki.

‘- When that kick was easily dodged, I lost.’

Even acknowledging that, Haruyuki said while not knowing when to give up.

“...Do you think that toy like gun can penetrate my armor?”

Then, on Red King's mask that only had two lens like eyes, a bright smile showed.

"If I said this gun was my strongest weapon, would you believe it, onii-chan?"

Haruyuki took a deep breath, then blew it out, with both hands - his left hand was mostly gone - held up.

"...I believe you. You win, Scarlet Rain."

Then, the Red King smiled once more, and said.

"Then, will you listen to my wish?"

"Eh? Wish...?"

It wouldn't be betraying the Black legion right? That would be impossible negotiation.

While he panicked inside, the answer was beyond his expectation. With a sudden threatening tone, the girl haughtily said.

"- I want to meet your «Parent». In the real world... with our real selves."

# Chapter 2

The following day, January 22nd, Thursday, 12:05pm.

While looking bleary eyed due to lack of sleep, Haruyuki walked towards the student cafeteria on the first floor of Umesato middle school.

Last night, Haruyuki eventually slept in his own room, and his second cousin Tomoko - the «Red King» who faked being her, slept in the living room sofa bed, but of course he did not have the courage to sleep properly in such situation.

What was the goal of the Red King anyway? Why did she pretend to be a sweet imouto character in the beginning and even bake cookies, and then want to meet and talk with Kuroyukihime, who is the Black King.

He wanted to think about that and other things seriously, but his brain kept replaying that bathroom scene, ‘ahaa this way I might really be a hentai, since I am a troubled 13 year old boy, however I already have someone called Kuroyukihime.’

With that kind of worry it became daylight, Haruyuki tried not to wake up the Red King who was sleeping deeply, ate cereal for breakfast then left his home quickly.

He somehow managed to get past his morning classes with the help of the Neuro Linker alarm to keep him awake, however when the noon recess neared, he was excited about meeting Kuroyukihime today too, so he was partially awake, and at the same time as the chime sounded, he rushed out of his classroom.

Haruyuki stepped into the still almost empty cafeteria, went between the long tables that were lined up, and jumped into the lounge that was on the other side.

A circular area with elegant round tables, at the farthest table inside. With the winter light shining through the glass wall behind her, was a black clothed human shape that looked as if she was shining with an aura, Haruyuki stared at her while forgetting to breathe.

During the past three months, he had seen the same scene many times. However, the painful tingling in his chest never seemed to wane. That this picturesque scenery exists today too, he thought was a miracle.

Looking small and quiet with her cheek resting on one hand, reading a large book on the table - Kuroyukihime eventually raised her head without a sound. Long black hair that flowed down her shoulders, shone in the soft sunlight.

“Ah, good morning, Haruyuki-kun.”

While feeling happy that the somewhat low and smooth silky voice called his name today too, he recalled a little bit of his recent clumsy battle losses and felt shameful, Haruyuki walked to her table and bowed.

“Good morning, senpai. That is... to...”

‘Today too, you are beautiful.’

He had the ambition of saying that one day, but he did not have the skill to say that with his human voice, so with no choice, changed to something else.

“...Today too, you are early. I have never gotten here before senpai...”

“That’s of course. The first year classroom is on the 3rd floor, and the second year on the 2nd floor.”

She shrugged with a composed expression. Haruyuki pulled out the chair beside her and sat down, then retorted.

“Th... that’s reasonable, but. Even though, that’s everyday...”

“That, I like waiting for you more than you waiting for me. In this precious time, I can store in memory from the moment you enter.”

Again, she smiled like a black lily flower opening.

Those words and smile was aimed at his fat and clumsy self, that made him feel equal parts of happiness and wither, he blew out his momentarily stopped breath slowly.

- It’s absolutely unbelievable. That the ephemerally kind senpai, and the Sparta demon instructor in the accelerated world were the same

person.

For Haruyuki, he wanted to spend more time with the former type, but that wish probably wouldn't be granted today. After he explained the situation from last night that continued today, the kind «Kuroyukihime senpai» will surely change into the scary «Black death water lily».

He wanted to spend even one second more looking into each other's eyes, while Haruyuki was thinking like a girl in love, Kuroyukihime said 'oh that's right' and opened her mouth.

"Last night's phone call... what was that? While I thought you went silent during the conversation, then suddenly you hung up after 'good night'. Something like... «Red King» was mentioned..."

"Ah... well... that..."

'In that one second of silence, I dueled with the Red King herself.'

If he had said that suddenly, she would not have believed him. For the level 9 «Kings», they no longer need to fight normal duels to earn Burst Points to level up, so they rarely appeared in battle fields.

So Haruyuki voluntarily told her everything. Everything starting with 'Welcome home, onii-chan' - he was not able to avoid the problematic bathroom scene.

A few minutes later.

Kuroyukihime with 30% amazement and 70% anger, took in a long breath, and held her hard right fist in the air.

'You fool!' Blam!

That angry roar and slam on the table, dangerously did not happen. In the lounge, some students entered while holding their lunch trays. They glanced at Haruyuki and Kuroyukihime, even though it was a familiar sight to them, the unbelievable expression still always showed on their faces, and they sat at tables a bit away from them.

Unlike Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime did not seem to notice the other students' looks, she held her fist about 5cm above the table and repeatedly breathed hard, then eventually lowering her hand onto

the table.

“Why did you not... notice when you first met her, I would like to say that very much... but with that perfect social engineering, also, the «King» herself coming is beyond expectations...”

“Ye, yea, isn’t that right?”

After avoiding Kuroyukihime’s violent eruption, Haruyuki rubbed his chest and nodded.

With her final expression heading towards a large bitter smile, Kuroyukihime shook her head many times and said in a low voice.

“Well... there’s also your unexpected success from failure. A direct fight with a «King», is an important experience that no amount of Burst Points can buy. How was the 2nd generation «Red King»?”

“Absolutely unreasonable. One hit blew away half of a city... my home was totally destroyed...”

Thinking back on that transcendental firepower made Haruyuki tremble. Seeing that, Kuroyukihime laughed.

“That is the power of «very specialized ability». I heard that «Scarlet Rain» put all of her level up bonuses into enhancing her long range firepower. That’s right... in your duel, did the Red King move?”

“Huh?”

Momentarily unable to understand the question, Haruyuki blinked.

Soon, he understood what Kuroyukihime was trying to ask.

That’s right - thinking back, while the Red King Scarlet Rain changed to her duel avatar in front of him, she was covered with that fortress like armament. She destroyed Haruyuki’s apartment home, and finally shot all that anti-air fire, but she did not move even once.

While he was shaking his head, he suddenly stopped.

No, to be exact that’s not right. At the duel’s very end, to avoid Haruyuki’s full speed descent attack, the Red King moved just one step - .

“Ah... she moved. Just for 50cm.”

Hearing that, Kuroyukihime finally smiled once more, and clapped her hands together.

“Oh, that’s impressive! One of Scarlet Rain’s names is «Immobile Fortress», it was given not because she could not move, it was because she did not need to move. According to rumors, in a large scale battle for the throne of 2nd generation Red King, she did not move even one step from where she appeared and destroyed around 30 people.”

“Wow...”

Haruyuki unconsciously let that out. Fighting that kind of person head on, being ignorant was scary.

“If... if I heard of that before, I would have surrendered at the start. Or more like, if I knew she was a «King», I would have instantly rejected the duel. Since it is called «Pure color six kings», I just thought the Red King would be «Red something».”

Hearing that, Kuroyukihime said with a smile.

“That’s why I said you were short on study on the phone. In the accelerated world, the Red crowned, is the one and only «Red Rider»...”

She said till there.

Then stopped abruptly.

As Haruyuki looked on, her smile slowly disappeared. Her white flesh lost blood, and seem to become pale as ice.

“Se, senpai...?”

After Haruyuki asked with wide eyes, Kuroyukihime replied with ‘No, nothing’ in a completely dry tone.

With a completely blank expression, Kuroyukihime slowly lowered her face. When he saw her right hand that was on the table trembling slightly, Haruyuki finally - way to late, realized the reason for Kuroyukihime’s reaction.

The previous Red King. «Red Rider».

It was the first time he heard of that name from Kuroyukihime. However, he knew the reason why the Burst Linker with that name

left the accelerated world.

Two years ago, Kuroyukihime - the Black King - Black Lotus, cut off his head with her own hands.

However it was not in a normal duel, it was during the gathering at the seven kings' conference. She sneak attacked him while he was delivering a speech.

For level 9 Burst Linker duel, a cruel rule existed that made them lose all their Burst Points even in one defeat. Without needing to say, those who lost all points is the same as forever losing Brain Burst itself.

Looking at Kuroyukihime's tightly clenched white hand on the table, Haruyuki half involuntarily asked.

“Senpai... perhaps, the previous Red King, to you...”

‘- Instead of just a friend, did he have some kind of special place in your heart?’

That question, instead of being concerned for the person in front of him, it's more to quell his own jealousy. After dangerously noticing that, he abruptly stopped what he was going to ask. Right after, he lowered his head trying to hide it.

“Sorry, I was way too insensitive. Last night's phone call... and the question now as well. I am sorry, really...”

“...No... it's okay, don't worry about it.”

That reply lost all luster and was faded.

“It's the path I chose. Having this kind of reaction means I am still immature. Fufu... I thought I had made up my mind long ago... that all other Burst Linkers are foes, that is set as «enemy»... this is what I get for being caught off guard, this is way too ridiculous.”

With Kuku low laughter, Kuroyukihime tried to put her hand back on her knee.

That hand, was held by both Haruyuki's hands that involuntarily reached out. It seemed like with a breath, she tried to pull her hand back hard, but Haruyuki became stubborn and resisted.

Even though she was bathed in the sunlight from the window, she

was as cold as a statue. He almost could hear her tendons that were strained to the limit.

While he tried to concentrate as much of his body heat into the cold hand as possible, Haruyuki opened his mouth.

“...I... I am...”

The image of what he wanted to say was in his head, but he did not have the ability to convert it into language. Not even noticing the stares of more students coming into the lounge, Haruyuki desperately moved his mouth.

“I will absolutely not fight with senpai. Never become your «enemy». Senpai is my «parent», and I am senpai’s «child». Before we are foes, we are family, right?”

The silence continued for a while.

Eventually, Kuroyukihime raised her head to look up at Haruyuki, and slowly nodded.

Her lips contained a light smile, however, Haruyuki saw that it was mixed with a somewhat sad feeling.

“...Let’s change the location.”

Kuroyukihime said simply, and this time she took her right hand back.

After that she got up smoothly, and started walking while holding her hardcover book, Haruyuki chased after her and inquired.

“Wh, where to...?”

‘To a place where we can be alone.’

That was not it, Kuroyukihime’s response was business like.

“How to deal with «Scarlet Rain», we can’t just decide that for ourselves. This kind of thing, must be conferred with the whole legion. For lunch, let’s go buy sandwiches.”

“Ah... Th, that’s right.”

While a bit disappointed, he was relieved that Kuroyukihime’s manner had returned to normal, so he nodded.

The Black Legion was called «Nega Nebulas».

It was a large scale naming with the meaning of a dark star cluster, but they were an ultra small legion with only three members, the last member responded to Haruyuki's email with 'on the roof'.

Haruyuki shrunk his head from the outside cold wind when he opened the iron door, he looked around, and found someone sitting on a bench far away.

While he quickly approached, what he saw was different from Kuroyukihime's view earlier, but was picturesque enough to hold his sight.

Slender but muscular and tall. His face under his long front hair wavering in the light breeze was gentle and sharp like a Japanese sword. Leaning forward slightly, his right hand fingers moved in the air, he was probably manipulating a holo keyboard, that posture looked like a samurai sitting in a kneeling position.

When the same aged boy noticed their foot steps and looked up, Haruyuki raised his right hand to wave to him.

“Yo, sorry to interrupt your studies. But, you don't have to study in such a cold place right, Taku?”

Hearing that, Haruyuki's childhood friend and brother in arms, Mayuzumi Takumu - that is Takumu, touched his frameless glasses and smiled.

“Doesn't the sunlight feel nice today? Haru, you should bathe in sunlight once in a while.”

Then he stood up energetically and deeply bowed to Kuroyukihime who was behind Haruyuki.

“Good morning, master.”

“Un, good morning, Takumu-kun.”

While nodding, Kuroyukihime had strong wry smile.

“I have said it many times, although it's true I am the legion master, you don't have to always call me that.”

“Sorry. But that is the best way for me.”

With that reply, Takumu moved a step, and indicated the bench he was sitting on with his left hand. With another wry smile, Kuroyukihime sat down, and crossed her black stocking small legs. Then she raised one eyebrow and inquired Takumu.

“Excuse us, but Haruyuki-kun and I will be eating lunch here, how about yours?”

“Yes, I have already eaten.”

Looking around, Haruyuki spotted a properly wrapped lunch box on the bench. Haruyuki remembered the cross colors, and made a jab at him.

“That, is made by Chiyuri right? Then you two should be eating together!”

Hearing that, Takumu also had a wry smile and answered.

“We don’t have a relationship like Haru and master, where we can have a public lovey-dovey time in the cafeteria.”

“I-it’s not love!”

“It’s not love.”

Haruyuki and Kuroyukihime denied with different voices, and Takumu laughed while pushing his glasses up with a finger.

“You two look at each others eyes every day in the lounge while exhibiting a pink aura. I’ve heard that rumor even in my classroom. Well, never mind that... I have stopped being hasty. Bit by bit, I will pay back what I owe.”

“...I see.”

Haruyuki made a serious face and nodded.

It was only two weeks ago, during the start of third school term, that Takumu had transferred to the local Umesato middle school from the school that he went to for seven years in Shinjuku.

The original school that he went to included grades from elementary to university. When Haruyuki remembered how hard the young Takumu had studied to get in, he tried to stop Takumu once by saying it was such a waste. However, Takumu’s decision was firm.

Even though Shinjuku is the territory of «Blue Legion», it was not that passive of a reason. For Takumu, his crimes - hacking his childhood girlfriend Chiyuri's Neuro Linker to break the accelerated world's rule for hunting Kuroyukihime, were too much for him. As atonement, he decided to use all his time to further her cause.

Basically, he will stay by Chiyuri. And then, defend «Nega Nebulas»'s territory, the Suginami area till death.

Put it in another way, Haruyuki thought that the glasses he started using this winter, was part of that decision.

In the year 2047, using glasses to correct vision had lost its original meaning and became a part of fashion. This was because the Neuro Linker worn by many people functioned as a strong visual supplement.

However, Takumu's blue glasses were not a fashion item. It's real with degree lenses. That is, Takumu became near sighted from studying paper media and panel terminals, and had stopped using the Neuro Linker as visual correction.

Even for the Neuro Linker, it could not correct the actual light receptor pins in the flesh eyeball. Instead of that, the fuzzy image from near sightedness is composed with the Neuro Linker's internal camera picture and digitally corrected in real time. That is, people in the world that use Neuro Linker as replacement for glasses, will have over half of their view being virtual images created by Neuro Linker processors.

Takumu rejected that function, and decided to continue seeing the real world with his own eyes. The real Chiyuri, Haruyuki, and the real himself.

Takumu's feeling will eventually reach Chiyuri, who continued to behave in an awkward manner. And Haruyuki himself too, should have conveyed plenty of his feelings.

That was what he wanted to say, but it was very difficult. Going back on his own words, Takumu too sometimes seems to be in deep thought.

That's right, he had eyes similar to Kuroyukihime's earlier when they talked about the previous Red King.

Haruyuki threw off his momentary musings and sat beside

Kuroyukihime, opening the lunch bag he held.

While he ate his cutlet sandwich, he again explained the situation to Takumu who leaned on the fence in front of them.

After the wide eyed Takumu heard everything, he mumbled a short ‘Hmm’.

“...What do you think, Taku.”

“Hmm, I do not have enough data to guess what the Red King wanted to say to master. But, I might know what would happen if she had managed to continue fooling you for three days.”

“Oh!”

“Oh.”

Facing Haruyuki and Kuroyukihime who both responded at the same time, his glasses’ lens flashed while Takumu continued.

“With Haru’s personality, he would have warmed up a lot to the «Imouto» that he lived with for three days. Then, if that «Imouto» said ‘Actually, I am a Burst Linker. But since I am a kid, most of my hard earned points were taken by legion senpai with force. I beg you, onii-chan, come to my legion and protect me!’...”

“Hey hey, that’s unreasonable.”

Kuroyukihime shouted in an amazed tone.

“No one would fall for that easy to see through trap. On the other hand you can easily see that you would lose all your points. Even Haruyuki-kun, won’t go that far...”

Then she glanced at Haruyuki,

“That... far...”

And was speechless. Since she noticed that Haruyuki’s eyes were already wet with sympathy.

“...Ar, are you an idiot!”

“B, but... bullied, so pitiful...”

At that moment, she extended her left hand, pinched Haruyuki’s

cheek and pulled.

“Wh, wha ar yo doin?”

“Hey, let me say this now.”

Kuroyukihime stared at him with shining eyes and murmured.

“Momentarily changing legion, helping your «Imouto» then returning, that kind of cool act is impossible.”

“Huh? Wha do ya mean?”

Nega Nebulas’ legion master answered him in a scary voice while releasing his cheek.

“You haven’t forgotten right? About how Takumu’s «parent» and other blue legion members who spread the backdoor program ended up?”

“Err, well... I think they lost all their points... that is, their Brain Burst was forcefully removed as punishment, I heard...”

To the head tilted Haruyuki, Takumu added from the front.

“That «all lost», it’s not from fighting duels till all their burst points were taken. Actually that’s impossible to accomplish. After the first duel, when acceleration is canceled, if you disconnect from the Global Net or remove the Neuro Linker, then you can escape. After that, it will be similar to master’s situation, where you will be chased with a reward on your head.”

“A, ahaa... I see.”

“However, without going through something so troublesome, legion masters have a simpler way of «executing» subordinates.”

“Wh... what!? I have never heard of that!!”

Hearing that for the first time, Haruyuki turned his head to look at Kuroyukihime beside him.

The composed face senpai made an ‘Oh, that?’ gesture and opened her right hand.

“It’s clearly written in the application document when you were invited to the legion, it was your fault for not reading it. Anyway, I

won't execute you. Of course, when you are unfaithful to me with other girls, that's an exception."

Smile.

While being looked at with that affection full smile, Haruyuki's back became straight.

"I, I won't do it, there's no way I would. B, but, I should learn of it for knowledge sake. Execution... basically, what does it mean...?"

"Hmm, let's see... well, it's all right to call it a type of special attack. When a legion creation is requested to the system, the one who is registered as the master will obtain a command, with assigned user names. That is called the «Judgement Blow»."

"Judgement..."

Kuroyukihime looked away from Haruyuki who whispered that, she became more serious and continued.

"Burst Linkers who joined a Legion, that is a team, obtain a lot of safety. Group battles have less risk and a more stable return. The price for those advantages is the existence of the «Judgement Blow». Joining a legion means putting your neck out to the legion master. The legion members who are struck with that blow, will instantly have zero Burst Points, and forever lose Brain Burst. The effective time frame is, while in the legion, and one month after leaving the legion."

"O, one month... that long?"

"Un. That is right. If you fall for Red King's social engineering and left Nega Nebulas for even just a bit to join the Red legion, then at that instant your... Silver Crow's life or death will be the same as in their hands."

"Uuheee."

That was all he could say.

Honestly, if he did not see that picture in his grandparent's home server, he could not deny the possibility that he would believe the Red King was his second cousin Tomoko-chan. If they then spent two nights together, and he was put to the earlier Takumu guess of "I am actually", he would probably have followed his feelings and

joined the Red legion. There was almost no question he would have.

‘- However, still.’

“...But, why?”

Haruyuki whispered, and looked at Kuroyukihime and Takumu one after another.

“Why, would the Red King do such troublesome thing...?”

“Umu. After all, it’s where this question leads.”

Kuroyukihime murmured.

“Nn... She went that far to get Haruyuki-kun to join the Red legion and put the «Judgement Blow» on his neck, but that won’t give her Haruyuki-kun’s loyalty. For a member that does not want to belong to that legion, that would only be harmful without a single advantage. That means...”

“That means, just once, she wanted Haru to do «something», right?”

Takumu pushed his glasses’ bridge up with his middle finger while he continued from where Kuroyukihime left off.

“If just once, he might listen with the threat... that’s what I think. If that is the case, then what she wants to say to master later in the meeting would be the same. Since her fake imouto act is found out, in exchange she changed tactics and is going for trade maybe?”

“Fuumu.”

After another low murmur, Kuroyukihime looked up at Takumu and said.

“How to say it... you, seem to be in good shape.”

“Wh, what? What do you mean, master?”

“Like a glasses type character. How about we call Takumu-kun ‘professor’ from now on?”

Clink clink, Takumu slip down the fence he was leaning his back on, and shook his head left and right.

“N, no... thanks for the offer, but I will have to refrain.”

Haruyuki desperately tried to control his laughter and said.

“I... I too, think Taku’s deduction is correct. During yesterday’s fight, the Red King could have had complete victory over me but did not. In exchange, she said she wanted to meet senpai. That would mean, for the second best option she picked negotiation, to show her goal is not to be an enemy maybe...”

“A bit late for you to say good things!”

Kuroyukihime snorted, and changed her leg cross. She crumbled her empty sandwich paper bag in her hand, and over threw it into the waste basket a bit away.

“Anyway fine, I will listen to what she has to say. At the very least, for the king herself to come while accepting «Reality Intrusion» means she has shit amount of courage, for a child. Haruyuki-kun, give the Red King a call. The meeting will be 4pm today, the place will be...”

Kuroyukihime stopped there for a moment and stood up.

She turned around, grinned and - .

“Your home living room.”

‘Nooooit’stooearlyIhaven’tmentallypreparedandwe’repureandpropermiddles

To that kind of confused refusal from Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime’s “The Red King is fine but I am not?” one sentence stopped him dead.

Since Takumu had invited Chiyuri to go home together, and later go to Haruyuki’s house, that naturally left just Kuroyukihime and Haruyuki going home alone.

She must be bringing her student council work home, while one of her hand is busy with the holo keyboard, she smiled and greeted many students on their way home. Haruyuki walking beside her took glances at her and desperately thought.

‘Let’s see, the living room, kitchen and toilet should be properly cleaned. I had bought tea and snacks as well. But the problem is my room. Especially the early era collection of Z type bloody games. If that was seen then I would have no foot to stand on from today.’

‘My room must be defended till death. Defend no matter what. Absolutely do not release the electronic lock.’

With that decision, Haruyuki stared at his apartment that could now be seen pass the elevated Chuo Line[2].

He entered the elevator with the usually nonvocal Kuroyukihime, pressed the button, and got off on the 23rd floor.

After about 10 meters of public hallway, it will be his home’s door.

“Ah... it’s a not especially interesting normal home. No pet either.”

“I, I see. No, no problem. I don’t like animals that shed their fur.”

With a cough, Kuroyukihime stopped next to Haruyuki.

‘Please, let nothing bad happen!’ With that prayer, Haruyuki touched the door opening dialogue in his view. Clank, the lock released.

The moment he pulled on the door knob, he heard.

‘Zubararararara’, that kind of machine gun continuous fire sound and, ‘Gyaa - Help Me - ’, that kind of English screams and, ‘Uorya -, Die -, Go Die -’, that kind of girl’s shout.

“Ugyaa - !!”

Haruyuki also screamed, and while taking off his shoes, he stumbled towards the living room.

What he saw there were, the previous era game hardware connected to the panel monitor on the wall, Haruyuki’s collection of Z type game packages scattered on the floor, and the shape of «Red King» sitting on the sofa cross-legged while holding a wireless controller.

“Ho... how... my room... key...”

To Haruyuki who mumbled after taking one step into the living room, the Red King glanced at him and said.

“Ah, welcome home. Onii-chan, you have a nice hobby. I love this type of thing!”

Next to the stood still, thinking frozen Haruyuki, a little bit

dumbfounded voice echoed.

“...Well, I don’t dislike it either. That era western games are philosophical, yes.”

At about that moment, in the large monitor, an old guy that is perhaps a mafia boss was blown away while spewing blood.

“Yes! Stage 5 cleared!”

While looking down at the elementary school girl doing a victory pose, Haruyuki once more murmured without any strength.

“How did you... the key...”

Then, the Red King posing to the game finally turned around.

She first looked at Haruyuki, then Kuroyukihime beside him, and smiled an angelic smile while shaking her twin red pigtails.

“I told you that I got an instant key from Onii-chan’s mother right. With a bit of work, it’s easy to make it into a master key. But, don’t worry, onii-chan. I did not touch the other meaning of Z type software behind the reference books”

‘I am done for...’

His school bag dropped from his right hand that no longer has strength.

The Red King looked away from Haruyuki who was like that, and once more looked straight at Kuroyukihime. All the innocence left her expression.

She put the controller beside her, raised both legs, and jumped impressively off the sofa.

Her clothing, was no longer the pure white blouse and navy blue skirt that she had on yesterday. A crimson T-shirt with a zippered black vest above, cut jeans showing the base of her slender legs, and red black bordered socks that came to below her knees.

And then, on her neck was a ruby like half transparent accessory, that is, the Neuro Linker shone brightly.

The girl that was dressed like a flame had a sword like sharp smile, she walked a few steps forward, to the opposite of Kuroyukihime

who was beside Haruyuki.

As a counter, the black clothed middle school girl with no color, like a concentration of cold darkness, returned an aloof look and attacked with a smile.

‘Crackle crackle’.

Seemingly blue white sparks were almost visible between the two, Haruyuki momentarily forgot about the disaster in the living room and slowly backed away.

‘- No way, they won’t just «duel» like that right?’

While he looked on with that serious worry, the Red King put her hands on her waist, and said with her jaw held high. Her voice no longer had a single fragment of the earlier sister taste.

“Hum, so you are the «Black King». I see, this is truly black, if it was night I wouldn’t be able to see you right in front of me.”

Kuroyukihime immediately crossed her arms and retorted.

“Now that you mention it, you are truly red, «Red King». It would be interesting to see cars stop if you were thrown into an intersection.”

The sparks instantly increased in voltage, Haruyuki shouted silently and backed away another step.

These two are both level 9 «Kings». If they duel, following that special rule, the one who lost will have her Brain Burst taken away. There is no way a light duel will happen either, since Kuroyukihime is easy to anger, and the Red King seem to be a livid character who hate to lose.

‘- Here, I have to jump in between them!’

With Haruyuki’s determination of noble sacrifice, he scratched the back of his head with one hand and said.

“A, ah, I am so happy to get a cute imouto and beautiful onee-san at once.”

When he giggled.

“I will kill you again.”

“Are you an idiot?”

Two ultra cold sounds were thrown at Haruyuki, hitting him between his eyes and in his heart.

They looked away from Haruyuki who collapsed slowly, and continued to stare at each other for a few seconds, then eventually both snorted and looked away.

“Hey, hurry and prepare tea and things, you seem to be inconsiderate.”

“Ah, Haruyuki-kun. I would like coffee, black.”

‘- The Tomoko-chan that baked cookies and made curry yesterday no longer exist.’

While Haruyuki was truly depressed about that fact, he retreated to the kitchen on all fours, and wiped his forehead when he could no longer be seen by those two.

At the large dining table, Kuroyukihime and Haruyuki sat beside each other, and opposite them the Red King sat cross-legged on her chair, drinking their coffee - Kuroyukihime is black, Haruyuki with milk and sugar, and Red King café au lait with mostly milk - together, at that time the chime rang at the house entrance.

From the door that Haruyuki opened with remote control, after ‘Sorry to bother you’, Takumu continued in a cheerful voice.

“Ah, it’s so nostalgic. How many years since I came to Haru’s house...”

Then he saw the tragedy on the living room floor, he seems to instantly understand what had happened, and with sympathy behind his glasses, he patted Haruyuki on the shoulder.

Next he stared at the Red King, his eyes instantly became small, and he silently sat beside Haruyuki.

That seat already had a coffee cup with a little bit of milk in it, Takumu said ‘itadakimasu’ then extended his hands towards it, and said in a tactful tone.

“First, let’s start with introducing ourselves. Here, shouldn’t you tell

us your name, «Red King»?"

After a look at Takumu, the girl snorted then opened her mouth.

"Well, fine. I will give you that much service. I am... Yuniko. Kouduki Yuniko."

Next she snapped her finger, and a crimson name tag flowed into Haruyuki's view. In a somewhat cute font, [Kouduki Yuniko] is shown.

That is like a name card for showing your name to someone you first met, it also act as a simple personal identification card. At the lower right side of the tag shone the Juki Net<sup>[3]</sup>'s certification mark, that would be hard even for wizard class hackers to fake, so the name on the tag should be «Red King»'s real name.

On the tag, other than name and other things, the birthday is also shown. Born on December 2035, that meant just 11 years old.

It is often said that Burst Linker's mental and physical age is out of sync, Red King - Yuniko's was hard to judge on first impression. Sometime she felt like much older than Haruyuki, and other times she could be seen acting her age.

"Fuun, Yuniko-chan huh."

Looking at the lightly laughing Takumu dubiously, Tomoko that is Yuniko said.

"Give your name too, «Cyan Pile»."

That sentence, showed that the Red King have very detailed information on the legion «Nega Nebulas».

Takumu probably realized that, his smile changed to a sarcastic one and he said his real name.

"I am Mayuzumi Takumu. Yoroshiku<sup>[4]</sup>."

Then he did a gesture of snapping his finger. It was probably sending his name tag to the Red King.

After a momentarily look in the air, she faced Haruyuki and pointed her chin.

"M... my name is already known to you. Arita Haruyuki."

“Send your tag.”

After being told, he manipulated his desktop.

Finally, the three pair of eyes concentrated on the so far silent Black King.

She raised her coffee cup to her face, and blinked her long eyebrows slowly.

“N? Ah, me. I am Kuroyukihime. Nice to meet you, Kouduki Yuniko-kun.”

“Hey you, that could not be your real name!!”

Yuniko instantly retorted, and Kuroyukihime flipped her finger with a cool face. Instantly, not just the Red King, in front of Haruyuki too floated a deep black name tag.

[Kuroyukihime].

On the right side below that written in large Courier font, the Juki Net certification mark shone clearly, Haruyuki sighed and shook his head. Just this person, he could not understand.

The Red King too, sighed with a difficult look, and clicked her tongue hard.

“Ah fine, whatever! I will just remember the cheeky girl who called herself Princess!”

If she tried to give her real name to Yuniko at that moment, with Kuroyukihime being able to hack the tag’s quantum signature key, there’s no way to tell if the next one would be real.

Kuroyukihime grinned and said in a cool voice.

“It’s much more cute than calling yourself «King» right? - Anyway, self introduction is over, let’s hurry onto the main topic.”

Her smile instantly disappeared, and her deep black eyes shone sharply.

“First, Red King... that is Yuniko-kun. I would have you tell me how you did reality intrusion on Haruyuki-kun.”

Hearing the unexpected question, Haruyuki was surprised and left

breathless.

That's right - everything with the problem, started with that. Not how the Red King faked being his second cousin Tomoko-chan, nor her goal. «Reality Intrusion» is a Burst Linker's biggest taboo - because that directly links Haruyuki to being in danger in the real world.

Yuniko glanced at the understandably green faced Haruyuki, then lightly shook her shoulders.

“You don't have to make that kind of face. Even in the Red legion, I am the only one who knows you are Silver Crow. I swear on the name of King. The way I did it was...”

There, she lifted part of her lips.

“It's the same technique as infiltrating this home. Social engineering. However, it could only be done by elementary school student like me.”

“Huh...? What do you mean...?”

“Everyone knows that your territory is Suginami. Then, with the time of your appearance we can find out that you are a middle school student. Do you understand up to there?”

«After you are born you must usually wear the Neuro Linker», with that being the first condition, the oldest Burst Linker now is not yet 16 years old. To be precise, there is a chance there might be first year high school students, but if they are a student, most can be determined to be middle school students.

With his nod, the Red King pulled her jaw slightly then continued.

“With that, I used my elementary student status to visit future middle schools in Suginami city district. With a visitor's pass, I can connect to the school local net. Then, when I am being shown the tour by a teacher, I «Accelerate» and check the matching list...”

“- And eventually found Silver Crow right. Hmm, a troublesome but logical method.”

After that little regretful sentence, Kuroyukihime continued with ‘However’.

“But, you won’t be able to tell which of the 300 student in Umesato middle school he is. How did you manage to determine it was Haruyuki-kun?”

Hearing that, the Red King bit her lips and was silent for a while.

She glared at Haruyuki sideways, and said in a childish excuse kind of voice.

“Listen, I do not have any special feelings for you. I only have a use for your duel avatar, to be more precise just the wings on its back. - After I found Silver Crow in Umesato middle school, I took a window seat at a family restaurant that can see the school gate, and accelerated when a student stepped outside of the school. At the moment Silver Crow appeared on the matching list, and the guy who stepped pass the line was this onii-chan, I was a little surprised.”

Normally he would listen to that speech while slightly bored, but this time he could not.

Haruyuki’s eyes became rounded, he opened and closed his mouth for a few times, then fearfully inquired.

“...That, how many, Burst Points were used...?”

“Around 200.”

“200!!”

Haruyuki shouted, Takumu dropped his cup, and Kuroyukihime had a large wry smile.

“...I see. That means, other than being an elementary school student, it’s a method that can only be used by a «King» with extra points. However, well... that’s an impressive obsession. Have you fallen that hard for Haruyuki-kun?”

“No way!!”

With an unreasonable kick to Haruyuki’s shin under the table, Yuniko retorted.

“I already said it!! I have no use for him, just his avatar!! Anyway, if everything had gone as planned, he would have been lured away to be my minion by now!!”

“That means...”

With a smile and calm light in his eyes, Takumu said in a quiet voice.

“That «need», is the reason why you used 200 points to do reality intrusion on Haru, used yourself to do social engineering, and finally requested this meeting.”

At that moment - .

Yuniko’s expression lost all childishness.

With her red hair swaying, she leaned her back on the chair, and the Red King acknowledged in a low voice.

“That’s right.”

She lowered her face with eyes half closed, and looked straight at Haruyuki with cherry brown eyes. That pressure, even this little girl, is a «King» like Kuroyukihime, he fully realized that.

“The wings on your back... «Flying ability», I want to borrow it just once. To destroy the «Disaster Armor».”

# Chapter 3

Haruyuki could not understand the meaning of Red King Yuniko's words. Takumu was probably the same, his eyebrows behind the glasses were slightly raised.

The one who showed extreme reaction was Kuroyukihime.

The right hand that she used to reach for her coffee cup was suddenly clenched together. Banging on the table with that fist, the Black King shouted.

"No way! That «Armor» is... supposed to be totally annihilated!!"

She stopped there with her eyes going empty and face white, Haruyuki fearfully asked.

"Ah... that is. What is that... Disaster Armor? It isn't a human, but a thing?"

Kuroyukihime continued to be silent for a few more seconds, then eventually leaned back on her chair and took a long breath.

While crossing her stocking legs, she turned her upper body toward Haruyuki.

"Nn... about that... As a human it's a Burst Linker, as a thing it's an object... it could be said to be like that. Haruyuki-kun, do you remember your first duel opponent?"

"Wha, y, yes. That bike guy... «Ash Roller»."

While that flashy chop bike and skeleton helmet appeared in his mind, Haruyuki nodded. He belonged to the Green legion whose territory ranged from Shibuya to Roppongi. They still fought once in a while with some wins and some losses.

"That man's bike. That's an object other than the rider himself, however together they make up the Duel Avatar. So that's a thing and a person, isn't that right?"

"Let's see... that, is right. For sure."

He nodded again.

“That kind of external item, is called an «Enhanced Armament» in the Brain Burst system.”

“Enhanced... Armament.”

Somehow, a cool name appeared.

Haruyuki was momentarily excited, but it was soon replaced by depression. For the empty handed Silver Crow, no matter how you put it, he did not have any.

Realizing what Haruyuki was thinking, Kuroyukihime said with a small wry smile.

“I don’t have any either, don’t be so depressed.”

“But I have.”

Yuniko said with relaxed lips. And was immediately bathed in Kuroyukihime’s sharp sound.

“In your case, instead of having, it’s more like the armament is the actual body.”

“Oh, I heard a nice loser phrase.”

Between the two glaring at each other, Haruyuki hurriedly cut in.

“I, I see. Scarlet Rain’s, that incredible firepower container... that is all an «Enhanced Armament», right?”

“That is right. However, it’s not such a rare thing that could make this little girl proud. There are four ways to obtain it.”

Kuroyukihime extended her thumb from her raised right fist, and continued.

“First, as beginner equipment at the start. Ash Roller’s bike is probably that.”

“My right hand’s «Pile Driver» is also that right.”

Hearing what Takumu interrupted with, Haruyuki involuntarily said ‘What’.

“Why does Taku also have one!”

“There there, let’s listen.”

“...Continuing.”

Her extending index finger’s nail snapped the air.

“Second, obtained using level up bonus. If it does not exist in the bonus selection, that’s impossible.”

“...I didn’t have any...”

Haruyuki whispered after remembering the three level ups till now. Other than that, he already followed Kuroyukihime’s advice and put all of his level up bonuses into speed and flight time upgrades.

Next Kuroyukihime lifted her middle finger and continued with the explanation.

“And the third. Use points to buy in a «Shop». Here it is possible for Haruyuki-kun too, well, I would not recommend it.”

“Huh? Shop... that is a store? That, where is it?”

“Secret. I can easily imagine that you will waste all your points.”

“N, no way.”

With ‘Ahaha’ laugh, Takumu also nodded.

“Without doubt. Haru’s personality changes when he goes to that kind of store.”

“Wh, what’s with you two...”

The relaxed air flowing around the living room - .

Was cut by Yuniko’s one sharp sound.

“...Hurry and say the fourth way.”

Kuroyukihime took the Red King’s dangerous look directly, nodded slightly, however did not say anything right after that.

Then, Yuniko extended her hand, forcefully extended Kuroyukihime’s ring finger, and spit out a short sentence.

“Fourth. «Take forcefully by killing».”

“Ki... kill...”

To the wide eyed Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime sighed and added.

“This, is still not fully understood phenomenon but... when a Burst Linker with an «Enhanced Armament» loses, if at that point his Burst Point became zero and forever leaves the accelerated world, there are cases where the ownership of the loser’s armament will transfer to the winner.”

“Low rate random event, is the current theory.”

Yuniko interrupted with that, then held the back of her head with both hands.

“But, that does not apply to «Disaster Armor»... Transfer rate 100%, a perfect cursed item...”

“But... however.”

Murmuring that, Kuroyukihime ground her teeth and snapped.

“Not possible. It was supposed to be destroyed. Two and half years ago, I clearly saw that «Armor»... «Chrome Disaster»’s final moment, and confirmed its annihilation!”

‘- Chrome Disaster is the legendary name of a Burst Linker from the early days of accelerated world from seven years ago.’

Kuroyukihime’s story started with those words.

‘- Covered in metallic grey knight like «enhanced armament», his incredible fighting power covered the ground with many dead Linkers. His fighting style was severe, or more like cruel, those who surrendered, heads were cut off, limbs disemboweled, it was violent to the extreme.

However, he who forced many opponents to forever lose Brain Burst, his final day also arrived. Aside from him, the highest leveled Burst Linkers at that time allied, and continued to go after only Chrome Disaster for duels.

Eventually his points dropped to zero and at the moment he «died» in the accelerated world, he shouted with a loud laughter. “I curse this world. Corrupt. I will revive again and again”.

Those words were true. The Burst Linker named Chrome Disaster

retired, but the Armor... the enhanced armament did not disappear. Its ownership transferred to one of the people in the subjugation alliance; lost to the lure of curiosity and the mentality of the Linker who put that on... was taken over. The till then admired noble leader, changed into a cruel killer over night. That savage shape could not be distinguished from the «First generation».'

Kuroyukihime stopped there, after she wet her throat with coffee, she continued in a low voice.

"The same thing happened three times. The owner of the «Armor» went on fearsome ravages, and was subjugated. However the armor did not disappear, it changed owners and changed personality and shape one by one... that Burst Linker no longer used his original name and became known as Chrome Disaster. Two and half years ago when I was already one of the «Pure color seven kings», I joined the subjugation of the fourth Chrome Disaster with the other kings. How incredible that fight was... I still feel it in my skin now. It could not be told in words..."

She returned the cup and rubbed her arms through her uniform, then Kuroyukihime's tone suddenly changed.

"Then, Haruyuki-kun. Sorry, but can you find two direct connect cables?"

"Wha... ca, cable!? And two of them...?"

"I have one already. The length, well, about one meter is fine."

"O... okay."

Haruyuki stood up while not understanding what's going on, ran to his own room, took two XSB cables from the wire rack on the wall and returned to the living room.

"There were just two cables. Let's see the length, this one is one meter, this one... err, 50cm."

While he shrug his head and dangle the cables from his hands, Yuniko stood up with an understanding like face.

"Hahaa, that huh. OK OK, I will endure the 50cm one."

She grinned, took the short cable from Haruyuki's left hand and plugged that into the connector on her red Neuro Linker. At that

moment.

“H... hey, don’t kid me! I will use that!”

“No way.”

Yuniko dodged Kuroyukihime’s extended hand and jumped to Haruyuki’s left side. Her body with youthful hardness was stuck to him and a sweet and sour like smell also drifted by. Haruyuki was lightly stunned. She hung onto his neck and extended the plug. Without any time to avoid, it was plugged into his Neuro Linker and wired connection warning appeared in front of his eyes and disappeared.

“U, uwaa!? Wh, what...”

Looking up at the flustered Haruyuki, Yuniko said with a fearless smile.

“Hey, hurry and plug in that long one, then give it to that girl. Ah, also, if you peek in my memory you will be sorry, so careful.”

With that speech, Haruyuki finally understood the meaning of three cables. Kuroyukihime wanted to daisy chain the Neuro Linkers of the four people here.

Takumu and Yuniko’s Neuro Linkers are the light weight type with only one external connection terminal. To connect four people, it has to be done with the double terminal high end type Neuro Linkers of Kuroyukihime and Haruyuki in the middle. Yuniko who realized that quickly, must have picked the shortest cable to annoy Kuroyukihime. With an instant effect, Kuroyukihime’s right cheek jerked and her fists shook as she shouted in a threatening tone.



“Hey you, don’t stick so close to him!”

“I have no choice, the cable is short.”

“You selected that one!”

Kuroyukihime who raised her voice, eventually snorted and looked down at the Red King with an absolute zero degree black snow smile.

“Exactly, that’s why I hate kids. Cable length as a measure of intimacy, truly ridiculous!”

“Oho, no one said that right? I just thought the shorter one will

have less signal lost.”

“Y, y, you...”

Seeing that absolute zero temperature raising quickly to the temperature of the sun’s surface, Haruyuki extended the cable, connected the other terminal on his Neuro Linker towards Kuroyukihime with ‘Your majesty please excuse this with your understanding!’ look in his eyes desperately. Kuroyukihime snatched that, while plugging it into her own Neuro Linker, she took out the usual two meter cable from her pocket and handed it to Takumu.

As the half amazed and half smiling Takumu looked on while plugging that in, another two direct connection warnings appeared and the four people’s Neuro Linkers were finally directly connected, Haruyuki relaxed with a sigh.

“...Ah, th, this... what is it for?”

“First, let’s sit.”

After saying that with a still gruff voice, Kuroyukihime sat down properly onto the living room floor. Before the cable was pulled tight, Haruyuki hurriedly follow suit, and Yuniko also sat down while sticking to his left side.

Finally, Takumu sat down properly like he was wearing a kendo uniform, and glanced at Kuroyukihime.

“Master, do we «Accelerate»?”

“No, no need for that. After the full sensory mode, fly towards the access gate shown. Then, let’s go... Direct Link.”

Seeing Kuroyukihime closing her eyes and relaxing her shoulders, Haruyuki hurriedly sang the command.

“Direct Link!”

Bit by bit, his fully body senses and the surrounding view went away. The Neuro Linker canceled the five real senses and led the consciousness towards the virtual world. In the darkness, only a strong falling sensation could be felt. If he kept waiting, he would full dive into Arita house’s home net. But before that happened, a round and shining access gate floated in front of him.

He extended his unseen right hand and the moment he touched it, Haruyuki's consciousness was drawn in by the gate.

Light expanded from the center of his view and covered Haruyuki. The scenery from deeper inside was an unlimited wilderness lined by many strange purple rocks.

While he was wondering where this place was, he looked down and was a bit shaky when he could not see his own body. However soon, he realized that this is not a virtual world but a VR movie that is a recorded video directly played in his brain. As evidence, the lower right of his view had a number that counted the play time and a slide bar.

“Ah... senpai?”

When he asked, a reply came from his right side.

“I am here. Takumu-kun, and the little girl is here too?”

He could not see her but it was without a doubt Kuroyukihime's voice. Continuing, “Yes”, and “Stop calling me like that” two sounds echoed. Haruyuki looked around again, after determining there were only rock formations, he timidly inquired.

“Err... wh, what is this movie file that is playing? If it is just watching a movie, why go to the trouble of direct connecting everyone...?”

“To stop any chance of it leaking outside. If I send it through your house's home net to everyone, there will be a cache left in the apartment server.”

“I, I see.”

He now understood the reason for direct connection, but the content of the movie was still a mystery. It could not be a movie that needed such precautions, as Haruyuki tilted his unseen head, at that moment - .

Suddenly he heard a sharp wind cutting sound above. Without the time to look up, around 10 meters in front of him, a shape landed with a sharp sound.

Deep black shining half transparent armor. Long and sharp sword like limbs. V shape head. Without a doubt, it is Kuroyukihime's duel

avatar, «Black Lotus».

“That is, senpai...?”

To Haruyuki’s involuntarily shout, Kuroyukihime answered with a ‘Un’.

“That’s me. That is, two and half years ago.”

“Two... and half years. No, before that... since senpai is in that shape, this is «accelerated world» right? That means this is a recording of a «duel»...?”

‘Does Brain Burst have this kind of function?’ he wondered and was about to ask, this time from his left side, Yuniko’s voice echoed.

“Something called «Replay». A shit expensive item that can record. Instead of that, two and half years ago means this is what you earlier mentioned as «Pure color seven kings» vs «Chrome Disaster» fight’s replay, right? Then why just you?”

“No, another will come soon.”

Before those words were finished, from left side of the scenery a new duel avatar’s shape appeared. ‘Is this a many vs one battle?’, while Haruyuki wondered in mystery, he stared at it.

About one head taller than Black Lotus. Slender, but with athletic limbs that have a feeling of volume. Left hand held a thick rectangle shield and right hand empty. The color of full body armor is - emerald like deep green.

“What a beautiful green color... master, that is...?”

Kuroyukihime replied to Takumu’s low sound.

“Yes. The «Green King». Affinity type is close range or indirect... but, the second name more accurately describes the ability. That is «Invulnerable».”

“Looks stiff. From rumors, all losses were from time out, and at those times its HP never went below half... that must be a lie.”

“You will understand if you watch.”

When Kuroyukihime curtly replied to Yuniko’s mocking tone, in the movie, Black Lotus approached the green avatar, and indicated with

gesture the shade of a large rock right nearby. The Green King nodded silently, went behind the rock and leaned back against it. The Black King also hid behind a rock a bit further away. Clearly, they were trying for an ambush.

Even understanding that this was a past recording, Haruyuki looked on while holding his breath. Suddenly ‘crackle’ like small sound echoed from his left side.

He moved his view. The crackle crackle sound of dry ground being stepped on came slowly closer.

A few seconds later, what appeared between the rock formations was a very huge duel avatar. Probably 50cm taller than the Green King. The body covered in bellow like metallic armor was strangely elongated, and the head tilted forward like a snake. Left and right arms were unbelievably long too. The hands that dangle down held a crude broad ax, its thick blade almost scraping the ground.

The head was covered in a worm like slippery cylinder, with two black holes at the top. From the darkness inside, red filled eyes moved around.

The full body armor was deep black cloudy silver. The avatar that looked around while sunlight reflected lightly off it suddenly stood still and stared straight at Haruyuki. At that moment, Haruyuki forgot that this was a recorded movie, and froze on the spot.

‘- What is this. This is a... Burst Linker? An avatar controlled by a real person?’

‘No way. This is like a robot... no, a wild beast.’

“This guy is... the fourth «Chrome Disaster»? Compared to the currently ravaging fifth, the form and size are totally different.”

To be expected, relaxed, however some light tension mixed in Yuniko’s murmur.

“It should be like that. That black silver armor is an «Enhanced Armament», it would change depending on the shape of the avatar who wears it. But, its characteristic won’t change no matter how many hundred generations. That is, thoughts of only insane attacks...”

Kuroyukihime responded quietly, like being led by those words, the

huge black silver avatar raised the large ax silently.

What the blade aimed for, was clearly the rock «Green King» was hiding behind. With whatever method, or just direct feeling, Chrome Disaster found out about the ambush.

“Gaa!!”

With a carnivorous beast like roar, the ax was swung down with furious speed. The thick rock was cut in half like butter, however right before that, the green avatar jumped out to the side of the rock’s shade.

To chase after that, the huge ax was swung again. The Green King that turned around, this time he did not dodge, and held up the shield in left hand instead.

Right after that, with a sharp metallic sound the shield extended in four directions, and from its rectangle shape changed to a huge cross shape. It was a size that covered all of the Green King’s body. In the center of that, the crude ax hit with power from high up.

With a loud noise that hurts the ears, waterfall like sparks flew. The ax was rebounded, but the Green King also knelt down.

“Gaa, Gagaa!!”

An angry and joyful sound leaked out of Chrome Disaster, with unreasonable moves, he swung the ax down many times. The attacks where even one hit could cut apart a body, the Green King’s cross shield continued to guard against them simply.

It was then that Haruyuki finally noticed that Chrome Disaster’s black silver armor had many deep wound like openings. While the ax was swung, from those wounds came black fog like substance that spread out in the air.

“Wounded...?”

After he unconsciously murmured, Kuroyukihime coolly replied.

“That’s right. That guy fought with other kings earlier and was driven here. As for the health gauge, it’s near death. But still that savage. At that time, I was frightened to the depth of my heart.”

‘That would be the case. Even watching a replay like this, the urge

to run away is strong.'

While he whispered in his mind, he felt that his supposed to be sensory cut real body's hairs were raised. Actually, it's unthinkable. Against the strongest in the accelerated world, the «Kings», this one sided crazy rampage - furthermore, this was near death stage. This means, Chrome Disaster's actual strength, could only be beyond level 9.

Maybe Chrome Disaster got annoyed with the Green King since no matter how many times the ax hit, it could not break the defense, so it made a low growl. While continuing the attacks, that long head extended - suddenly, the mouth opened with a wet sound.

From the mouth, or more like a concentric suction hole's center, a long tube like tongue extended, that Haruyuki stared at while dazed. At that time Kuroyukihime said with a sharp sound.

"That, is one of Chrome Disaster's abilities, «Health Drain». That guy can steal duel opponent's HP gauge."

Like those words said, the long tube went around the Green King's shield and extended near the neck.

"Look out!"

Haruyuki shouted in reaction, and right after.

The till now not joining the battle even once, hidden Black Lotus jumped out from deep to the view like a black lightning bolt.

Her right hand sword swung down with unseen speed and cut off Chrome Disaster's tongue from the root.

"GaaGagagagaa!!"

From the round mouth, a clear scream and black darkness spew as the huge avatar leaned backward. Aiming for the large wound on its chest, Black Lotus's left leg sword pierced all the way through without mercy.

The long blade that pierced through the back suddenly shone a dazzling violet. The Black King raised her leg and cut upwards, dancing higher above, and elegantly flipped around. Before the shining deep black avatar landed, Chrome Disaster's head was split in two - .

There, the slide bar that showed play time in the lower right reached the far end.

With Link Out command, Haruyuki returned from full dive, he noticed that his real hands were wet with sweat.

Takumu who sat in front of him also looked similarly green in the face. Looking left, he saw the Red King Yuniko too was silent with stiff lips.

“...That guy continued to fight in that condition for another two minutes before it finally ended.”

Kuroyukihime murmured just that, and pulled out the two cables plugged into her Neuro Linker at the same time. Haruyuki did the same, while controlling his stiff hands, he inquired with a dry voice.

“That... is that really a Burst Linker? Like us, a real player was inside that...?”

“Without a doubt. The current fifth too, with big difference in fighting method... But, that's that, Black King.”

Yuniko stood up while saying that in a low voice, and glared at Kuroyukihime with an unusually grim look.

“You guys went to a lot of trouble to defeat the fourth, that is certain since there is a replay to prove it. But... then, why did that «Armor», that enhanced armament did not disappear!?”

“It disappeared!”

Kuroyukihime stood straight up and shouted back.

While grinding her teeth, Kuroyukihime sat on a chair by the table, and waited for the other three to sit down before continuing with a suppressed voice.

“...When the owner of that «Armor», the fourth Chrome Disaster left the accelerated world forever, the Green King and I met up with the other five people, and checked our status window there. Everyone there clearly said it. That the «Armor» was not in their storage. That meant it disappeared... the curse about it transferring to the one who killed the owner was broken at that time. In fact, Chrome Disaster did not appear since then!”

That final part was almost said with a shout, then Kuroyukihime glared at Yuniko with a challenging look.

Withstanding the pressure from the deep black eyes directly, the second Red King returned sharply.

“Then, explain the current situation! The fifth appeared, ravaging like the past is a fact!”

“...What is the name of the fifth? Even wearing the «Armor» and mentally corrupted by it to become the fifth Chrome Disaster, the name registered in the system would not change. In a duel, you should be able to find out the name of the avatar inside the armor. The one who was taken over by the armor, which King was it!!”

This time, Yuniko looked down and was silent.

After a few seconds, blowing out a long breath, the girl shook her head left and right.

“...It’s not a King. The fifth, is my... Red legion, «Prominence»’s member. The original name is «Cherry Rook»... but, he’s no longer the original person. He was eaten by the armor, and has disappeared.”

That voice, contrary to the violent language, was somewhat dry and wavering.

Kuroyukihime’s eyes became small, and she touched her thin color lips with her right hand finger.

“Not a... King...? Red legion member...? However...”

Kuroyukihime frowned and started thinking, then Takumu lightly raised his hand and said.

“It might be like this, master. Enhanced Armament, even ones from shops, can be transferred to another Burst Linker in the real world with direct connection. It’s not something I should say, but thinking about that backdoor program incident, I don’t think all the kings are incorruptible pacifists. One of the Kings with an agenda might have sworn a false oath and secretly kept the «Armor» and might have given that to «Cherry Rook»?”

“It would be... like that... It was mentioned earlier, Kings... level 9 players have no reason to desire lots of points. Since no matter how

much is gained, you can not become level 10. That's why, if given out... it's only for the reason of strengthening your own legion and weakening other legions... so releasing the uncontrollable Chrome Disaster has way too high risks. Before that, for a Red legion member to have it, it should have come from the Red King. That certainly might be the case but... the Red King that had joined the subjugation two and half years ago..."

Momentarily, Kuroyukihime's voice paused, probably only Haruyuki noticed it.

Suddenly under the table, Kuroyukihime's cold left hand touched Haruyuki's right hand. Gaining warmth from there, the suppressed wavering speech continued.

"The Red King from then is no longer in the accelerated world. After just three months since the subjugation of Chrome Disaster, he was also struck down. So, it could not be from him."

"At that time, I was still a growing Burst Linker chick so I don't know the details."

The Red King did not seem to notice Kuroyukihime's momentarily conflict and interrupted with a somber voice.

"Obviously, I did not obtain the «Armor» from the previous generation King and even if I did obtain it, I would not think of letting a member wear it. There's no way... after seeing that fiendish like battle..."

"Is the fifth also... that incredible?"

To Haruyuki's question, Yuniko looked up slightly and spit out.

"In a certain sense, beyond that earlier replay. That guy is no longer a Burst Linker, or more like fighting is no longer a «duel». I... I saw him eating a fallen opponent's arm."

"Gee..."

He unconsciously imagined the scene and groaned.

After overwriting the sour after taste with his coffee full of milk and sugar, Haruyuki asked the two Kings.

"B, but... earlier you said «taken over» and «mental corruption»..."

enhanced armament, that is just an item right? To be able to interfere with the actual Burst Linker's thoughts, is that possible...?"

"Yes. It's possible."

Kuroyukihime instantly said.

"Do you remember? At the time Haruyuki-kun became a Burst Linker, I explained it. That Brain Burst read the owner's inferiority and obsession, then compressed them to make the Duel Avatar."

"Y... yes."

"That means, not only can the Neuro Linker access the sensory part, but it can access the thinking and memory part of the brain as well. For normal applications those are strictly forbidden areas. ...That is, enhanced armament is tainted with negative awareness of the Burst Linker who created it. If another person wears it, that awareness could be thought of flowing the opposite way."

"That... kind of thing..."

Haruyuki's back shivered. He had no more room other than carrying his own negative thoughts, so he is sure that he would be instantly crushed if he had to carry someone else's burden.

"I... I don't want enhanced armament."

"That's good."

Kuroyukihime nodded after a short laugh.

"Well, to be able to corrupt personality, probably only the «Chrome Disaster». The first generation, what kind of person was he...?"

"I don't know and have no interest!"

Suddenly, with a chair clanking sound, Yuniko stood up and shouted.

"Big troublesome shits, the idiot who made it, and the one who got and hid it to give «Cherry Rook» as well! Cherry was... a nice guy. He did not have any flashy ability, but slowly he worked hard to get to level 6, and the fun was just starting! And then... shit, damn!!"

The Red King who quickly turned her back, Haruyuki saw some wetness in her big eyes.

Glaring at the high-rise buildings outside the balcony, Yuniko squeezed out a shaking sound.

“...That guy, while belonging to the Red legion, attacked other Kings’ legion members left and right. Breaking the no invasion treaty. I... have to purge him.”

The brief heavy silence was - .

Broken by Kuroyukihime’s quiet sound.

“...I see. For Chrome Disaster who is normally hard to defeat... to still belong to a legion. For you who is his legion master, just one blow will forever exile him from the accelerated world. - With the «Judgement Blow».”

“...”

After a few more seconds of silence, Yuniko slowly nodded, however she shook her head left and right next.

“...Ten days ago, I challenged him who just had reached level 7 while being negligent. To purge him. But... do you believe it, Black Lotus. That guy... Chrome Disaster avoided all of my long range attacks.”

“...Say what?”

“«Judgement Blow», no matter for which legion master, is an almost zero range contact ability. For it to hit, you have to score a number of normal attacks and stop the person. But no matter how many times my main cannon and missiles were fired, I was not even able to scratch him... I was hit here and there by his sword and lost HP. In the end... it was time up and I lost.”

“Lost!? Let’s leave «Judgement Blow» alone, a King like you lost!?”

“Such a big show of surprise... you also fought it before so you should have understood. That mobility, other than a monster no one has. Huge distance jumps, changing path in the air... it was almost like flight.”

“Fly... ing...”

With that whisper, Kuroyukihime first looked at Yuniko standing pass the table, then at Haruyuki sitting next to her.

Then, she slowly and deeply nodded.

“I see. Finally, your goal... using a very troublesome way to do reality intrusion on Haruyuki-kun and using yourself to do social engineering, I understand the reason now.”

At that time, Takumu seemed to have reached the same conclusion. Looking dubiously at the three other than himself, Haruyuki moved his body and view around.

“Wh... what is it? The goal... what is that anyway?”

“Isn’t it obvious, onii-chan♪”

Yuniko’s mood suddenly changed sharply and said sweetly with angel mode pure simile.

“I need Haruyuki onii-chan to capture Chrome Disaster.”

After about 5 seconds of relaxed feeling.

‘No way...I am scared. Don’t joke.’

Haruyuki screamed that, falling from his chair and went to hide behind Kuroyukihime.

However Kuroyukihime titled her head as if thinking about something, then ruthlessly held the back of Haruyuki’s uniform and pulled, saying with a saint like smile.

“Haruyuki-kun, you should experience everything. I think there’s no harm in trying.”

“Wh... whattt!?”

“I never said it would be a one on one fight. Also, this is not just the Red legion, it’s all of accelerated world... including our «Nega Nebulas»’s problem. Then here, it’s time for you to stand up like a man as a Burst Linker.”

‘- This person saying that with this face, she is planning something.’

That appeared in Haruyuki’s mind, but he could not determine what that «something» was, so he desperately tried to find excuses.

“B, but... that’s an opponent that the King, that is level 9 Scarlet Rain could not deal with! Level 4 me would be instantly blown

away and it would be over! I don't want my head and arms to be pulled off!"

"I won't let that happen to you."

Another smile that can melt the highest grade gelato [5].

"Use your speed and flight ability to chase Chrome Disaster and just stopping him for a short while is fine. Afterward this little girl and I will rob him of mobility."

"So... so simply said, but..."

Being a bad loser, Haruyuki put this normal run away skill into full gear, and mumbled his final rebuttal.

"That's right... that requires a team battle to happen first right? Also, against just Chrome Disaster, at the very least needs senpai, Scarlet Rain and I. He would not accept such a disadvantageous duel!"

For Burst Linkers, while their Neuro Linker is connected to the net, could not refuse a normal one on one duel from other Burst Linkers. But if the battle mode was «Team» or «Battle Royale», that's another story. In that situation, it would be three against one with Chrome Disaster, with that kind of disadvantage, there's no way he would accept.

'- No, wait. Earlier, didn't he have the same question?'

After nodding lightly to the speechless Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime took a glance at Yuniko and asking in confirmation.

"If Chrome Disaster would have been rampaging with normal battles, I would have heard about it already. However I have not heard a single rumor, so that means..."

"...That's right."

The Red King put her hands into her cut-jean pockets and twisted her slender upper body around to nod.

"That guy's hunting ground is no longer the «Normal Duel Field». Above that... in the «Unlimited Neutral Field»."

'...What is that?'

Haruyuki raised his head with a question mark, instead a bit to the right front, Takumu shouted sharply.

“Da... dangerous, master!”

He rose up with a clank from the chair and continued.

“With our lineup, diving «above» is way too reckless! For me and Haru maybe, but you are chained with a special rule! If you were suddenly ambushed by other level 9 players, with one loss, at that instant you would lose Brain Burst forever... no, in the worst case...”

Takumu took a quick glance at Yuniko to the right and after a bit of hesitation, touched the bridge of his glasses with his right hand finger and said.

“...It's my duty to say this, so let me say it. - The worst case, all of this act... Haru's reality intrusion, the talk about Chrome Disaster, all of these could possibly be the Red King's trap. To lure master into the «Unlimited Field», with a big army in ambush, planning to take your head, is possible.”

Yuniko who again returned to the little devil mode, with her hands in pockets, point her small jaw and glared at Takumu.

“...Well said, Cyan Pile. Everything you said earlier was in a clever way, what are you? Glasses character. Nickname Professor?”

Hit.

His little hurt face soon returned to normal, Takumu said in rebuttal.

“Show some kind of proof, then we can talk, Red King. We are just a three person legion, for us to dive «Above» knowing the danger, you should provide some kind of proof!”

“Here is your proof.”

Yuniko took her right hand from her pocket and manipulated her virtual desktop for a bit, then snapped three fingers. In Haruyuki's view, another half transparent name tag appeared. But, this time bigger than the one earlier. Not just the real name, below that also showed home address.

Starting from Nerima ward in Tokyo, ending with unfamiliar school

and dormitory name, Haruyuki looked on in amazement. With face and name can be said to be plenty of «Reality intrusion», showing home address too, is way past courage into recklessness.

Takumu and Kuroyukihime too were surprised by that, while being looked on by three silent and wide eyed middle school students, Yuniko removed her right hand from her virtual desktop and poked her small chest with her thumb.

“You still do not understand why I personally contacted you? The real world me is an elementary kid with no strength, economic or organizational power. I have no way to defend against «attacks» on me. If I betrayed you, you can come get revenge anytime you like in reality.”

Yuniko who said that, her eyes seem to be burning from the left over winter sunlight coming through the window.

He thought she was reckless, but she had tremendous resolution. To be true, she could not possibly overlook the problem of her legion member breaking the no invasion treaty and attacking other legion members. However, before everything else, Brain Burst is just a «Duel Game». Something that exist for play, enjoy and excitement.

That's why Haruyuki thought that sacrificing your real self for Brain Burst is a mistake. That deceived Takumu three months ago, and he is still tormented by it now.

“Yuniko... -chan.”

In place of the overwhelmed Takumu, Haruyuki involuntarily called out, trying to find words to continue.

However, that one word seemed to allow the Red King to see through his heart, she lowered her right hand and said with a self delirious smile.

“I understand what you want to say. But... you will eventually come to understand when you get to this height, that this game with «accelerate» technology can make the wall of real side thin. If you knew how much time that girl and I spent in the accelerated world, you would certainly fall right down.”

“Wh... total play time...?”

Haruyuki titled his head and did a little calculation. Right now, he

had about 10 «duels» per day. Each fight average around 20 minutes, so total 200 minutes - a bit more than 3 hours. It's a bit high playtime for a middle school student, but not way too absurd.

If one day is around 3 hours, one month is 100 hours. One year is 1200 hours. Since Yuniko became a Burst Linker for about two and half year -.

“3000... hours or about?”

That's a big number, but compared to actual VRMMO-RPG addicts, that's nothing. Those people dive at least 10 hours a day.

However, after hearing Haruyuki's hard mental calculations, Yuniko laughed aloud and Kuroyukihime too had a slight wry smile.

“Wh, that's not right? Yuniko-chan, then how much total time...?”

“Not telling you. That answer, you can find out yourself. Also...”

The Red King suddenly put on a scary face and said in a threatening tone.

“Stop calling me Yuniko-chan. I get shivers in my back. ...Niko is fine. Call me Niko, absolutely not allowed to add -chan or -tan.”

Somehow feeling that they are off topic, Haruyuki nodded and looked around.

“Let's see... So the result is that «Nega Nebulas» will assist Niko-cha... the Red King, is that right?”

“...Umu. There are many risks, but for now we will swallow it whole. Also, there is some merit.”

“M, merit?”

Kuroyukihime looked away from Haruyuki who asked that, towards the Red King.

“That's right. «Prominence» under the sun coming to request this very big favor, must have prepared some kind of exchange condition. For example... from now on do not touch our small territory, things like that.”

“Chii.”

With that small click of her tongue, the Red King - Niko light waved her right hand.

“I understand. If you are fine with a verbal promise. My guys won’t touch the Suginami area.”

Kuroyukihime nodded slowly, then one finger from her folded right hand came up.

“However, just one thing. Scarlet Rain... how are you supposed to ambush Chrome Disaster in the «Unlimited Field»? In that place, it’s almost impossible to purposely encounter someone, you should have already known that.”

“...I won’t trouble you guys. It’s my responsibility to determine the time and place. Not right now, probably tomorrow evening... is all I can say.”

“Ohh. You can do that?”

To Kuroyukihime’s question, Niko nodded.

“I will leave it to you. Tomorrow after school, we will meet here again and dive into the «Unlimited Neutral Field». Is that okay, Haruyuki-kun and Takumu-kun?”

‘- What is that Unlimited Field anyway?’

Before that question, Haruyuki was surprised with ‘Arg, my home again!?’ that shout in his mind. His mother won’t be home till the day after tomorrow so that is fine, if he returned home tomorrow, and this time Niko played with praise the «other type of Z games» in the living room - if that happened, he would not be able to stand up again.

‘Defend till death. This time he will defend his room till death!’

With that oath, Haruyuki and Takumu both nodded.

“Then, for today from now on is free time. Haruyuki-kun, thank you for the coffee.”

With those words Kuroyukihime stood up, she again looked at the tens of years ago vintage collection of western games scattered in the living room.

“Next time, I will come to play normally. There are many titles I don’t know of.”

“Y... yea, please do.”

‘Something that doesn’t have a lot of blood and guts spilling.’

He added that in his mind, then walked Kuroyukihime and Takumu to the entrance.

“See you Haru at the school tomorrow. Uwaa, it’s already this late.”

First Takumu waved his hand then walked out of the hallway to another part of the apartment, next Kuroyukihime put on her loafers and turned around.

“Ah, that is. I will walk you home, it’s late...”

Haruyuki said that, but she waved her hand lightly and said.

“No need to worry, with student council work it’s even later than now, so this is nothing. Also, this place is pretty close to my home.”

“Is that... so. But, be careful.”

“Un, then, sorry to have disturbed you. See you tomorrow.”

Kuroyukihime smiled, raised her right fist, then was about to step outside the door.

To her back, from behind Haruyuki, Niko’s drawling voice called out.

“See you, black one. Don’t be late tomorrow. Okay then, time to continue.”

To the Red King who then skipped to the living room, this time Kuroyukihime turned around with incredible speed and shouted.

“Hey wait, wait a minute, red one!”

“What?”

She glared at Niko who stuck her head out and cross-examined.

“You are not thinking of staying here today as well.”

“Of course. It’s troublesome to go back all the time.”

“Don’t mess around, go home! A child should go home, do homework, brush teeth and sleep!!”

That fiery sharp tongue was washed away by a grin from Niko.

“But, my school is a boarding school. After getting a three day pass to go out, even if I return, there won’t be any food. ...Anyway, onii-chan, what should we have for dinner tonight?”

After saying the later part in angel mode, Niko disappear into the living room.

“Wha... wha...”

While her face quivered as if right before a huge eruption with her fists shaking, Kuroyukihime glared sidewise at Haruyuki who stood there dazed.

“...Cancel the ‘See you tomorrow’. I will stay over here tonight too.”

With that fearsome announcement, that was declaration of war, she forcefully shut the door, took off her shoes and stamped pass the hallway into the living room.

It took more than one minute for Haruyuki’s totally frozen brain to restart.

‘- What is this?’

‘What is this....what is happening...is this reality? Or is everything and everyone a polygon created fake reality?’

Haruyuki sat on the living room sofa, hugging a cushion, and stared off into space.

Maybe everything from the beginning - meeting Kuroyukihime, obtaining Brain Burst, and becoming Burst Linker «Silver Crow» was all a dream. Maybe an escape from reality application was running that allowed him continue to see such long delusion.

Those were Haruyuki’s serious doubts, but the hamburger he ate just 30 minutes ago, its slightly burnt aftertaste, the happiness in his stomach, and also from the bathroom in the hallway, sounds of water and girls’ playful sounds were way too real.

After Kuroyukihime's sudden announcement, the three of them went shopping in the mall under the apartment, made dinner together, washed dishes - and then Niko and Kuroyukihime went to use the bathroom first together. That's what happened.

The situation where everything occurring all at once was so unreal that Haruyuki wasted it, being mostly on automatic mode. «While parents are away» «two girls came to stay over» «made dinner and went to bath», those kind of situations could not be adjusted into his consciousness.

What is the best way for him to act? Normally in this situation how is a man suppose to choose as best selection?

While steam puffed from his ears, Haruyuki tried to spin his overloaded thoughts. In this type of game or anime, for this kind of scene usually the man went to ask how the bath water was, and «something» made him stumble into the bathroom. Then buckets, shampoo and things will be thrown at him to drive him away.

‘Then, me doing that would be an optimized solution.’



Haruyuki stood right up and turned towards the bathroom. In his brain, there already floated an event graphic where Kuroyukihime and Niko washed each other wearing just bubbles.

However unfortunately, or in other words fortunately, right before he opened the living room door, he heard two sets of footsteps heading there. Haruyuki teleported at light speed to the sofa and sat down properly.

After the knob's violent turn, Niko jumped in first shouting 'ice ice!' and ran to the kitchen. Haruyuki turned around in reaction to the loose sweatshirt and shortpants rough shape, this time his eyes met Kuroyukihime's.

It must be the one she bought in the shopping mall that evening, she was wearing a light pink pajama. Her head tilted, drying her shining hair with a towel, that shape is different from her normally all black clothing that rejected others, she stood there unbelievably defenseless and lovely, Haruyuki could only watch in a daze.

“...Don’t stare so much. This color was the only size that fits.”

As Kuroyukihime said that while looking away, Haruyuki finally snap back and shook his head hard left and right.

“N, nooo way, m, matches nicely.”

“I, I see. Isn’t it a bit childish?”

“Absolutely not. Great. Perfect. Critical.”

While sitting properly he stretched his back and desperately said up to there, from the side Niko showed her face while waving a popsicle in her right hand.

“Hey, do you know, Silver Crow?”

“Wh... what about?”

“This girl, even looking like that, after she is naked, is unexpectedly sugofuu”

The end of those words was messed up by Kuroyukihime’s unsparing one hit.

She then held the Red King’s neck from behind, and laughed generously.

“There, you should hurry and use the bathroom. The bath water will get cold.”

Looking at Niko who collapsed, Haruyuki gave a scream in his mind and jumped off the sofa.

“Y, yes, then excuse me, I will go take a bath! There’s barley tea and things in the fridge so feel free, I am off!”

That night turned out to be a late night Z type retro game spree night.

Sitting around the large game hardware from 40 years ago, with excited shouts they massacred creatures in the flat screen, Haruyuki still continued to think a little about if that was really real.

‘- These people and me, are basically connected to each other through a VR game called Brain Burst. That’s why their relationship is online, that is net based, it should be recognized like that.

Certainly, I love Kuroyukihime senpai, and she said she love me too. However, the intermediary of those feelings were usually quantum signals exchanged through the Neuro Linker. Their relationship is mostly made up of vector data, he thought it was fine like that.

But today, they made dinner and ate it together in my home, took turns to bath, and now are sitting a few 10cm or so from each other, feeling each other’s body heat.

This world - the separation between real and virtual is infinitely thin, in a world where information from your five senses are hard to distinguish which are analog and which are digital, this is what would happen? Things like «Offline human relationship», how do I capture and recognize it? So far in the offline world, all I had been doing was run away, hide, and huddle.’

His thinking that went round and round, was covered by a flashy scream from a huge boss monster in the screen.

At the same time, Niko let go of her controller and lay down backwards.

“Ah... I can’t take it anymore. Sleepy. Sleepyyy!”

“That’s why I said, children should hurry... Fuwa...”

Kuroyukihime also covered her mouth with her left hand, letting out a refined yawn.

Since his Neuro Linker was taken off, he looked at the clock on the wall, it was past midnight.

“Th, then, we should sleep. Let’s see... Yuniko-cha, not that, Niko is fine with the sofa today too right. So, senpai please use my mother’s bedroom. Ah, but the heat wasn’t on for a while so it might be cold...”

Haruyuki said till there, then Niko interrupted loudly.

“Never mind, too troublesome. Just bring out blankets, I will sleep here... it's fine...”

Then, she buried her head in a huge cushion, and closed her eyes quickly.

“Un, that's fine with me too. Sleeping together around game software, is truly a historical experience... or not...”

Kuroyukihime too lay down onto a cushion.

‘Whattt - .’

What he was thinking was, he would not be able to imitate «carry both to bed», so he did as told and took out some blankets. He used them to cover the already sleeping Niko and Kuroyukihime, and thought ‘now then’.

‘Should I be sleeping in my own room?

But, with both guests sleeping on the floor, wouldn't it be bad manners for me to sleep in a bed? Here, shouldn't I sleep on the floor as well for fairness? Isn't that what a gentleman should do?’

After his own suggested justification, Haruyuki turned the ceiling lights to the lowest level, and slowly became round there. The floor was slightly warm from the buried heating pipes, the large semi-fluid cushion was fluffy soft - and within hand reach distance, was extremely nice smell.

‘There's no way I can sleep in this situation!’, while thinking like that, Haruyuki closed his eyes under the blanket.

However strangely, in exchange of tension, a mysterious peace covered Haruyuki, and his consciousness slowly fell into the gentle darkness.

Deep in the night, Haruyuki woke up just once.

He stood up thinking of going to the toilet, and look around casually, in the dim lighting and blue white moonlight, there was an unexpected scenery.

Niko and Kuroyukihime who were supposed to be one meter apart,

some unknown time ago, had fallen between two cushions and were sleeping soundly.

Furthermore, Niko had her face buried in Kuroyukihime's chest, her right hand holding tightly on to the pajama fabric.

And also, Kuroyukihime had her arms around Niko's red head like she was holding her.

That scene, before he was surprised by it, his heart was moved by something and Haruyuki opened his eyes wide.

«Red King» and «Black King». They are level 9 Burst Linkers chained with a special rule of sudden death.

Those two spent an unknown amount of time in the accelerated world and fought many fights to the death. What they were looking forward to, Haruyuki could not imagine. However he could say this. If they both aimed for level 10, someday they will have to fight. To defeat other Kings, is how a King moves forward.

But.

Tonight, these two, with a coincidence brought together by complex situations, slept together in the real world like this. Just like at the bottom of their hearts, they wished for that.

This is, this scene, is just one night's illusion? An incidental miracle that won't happen again?

Or it could be - .

Haruyuki at that moment captured a premonition that he had arrived at a very important something.

However, the unknown feeling overwhelming his heart and the tears flowing out of his eyes, he could not put his thought into words accurately.

So Haruyuki just stood there, looking at the girls sleeping soundly in the blue white moonlight, without being full no matter how long he continued.

# Chapter 4

“Then, I will be going.”

“I... I am leaving.”

“Okay, have a nice trip... Ah.”

To Kuroyukihime and Haruyuki’s farewells, Niko rubbed the side of her face lightly and then wrinkled her eyebrows.

“...Hey. Isn’t this a bit weird?”

“Nn, what is?”

“No... even if you ask what is...”

While Niko crossed her arms and started thinking, Kuroyukihime shrugged her shoulders lightly and said.

“Strange girl. Instead of that, I will leave the details of today’s battle plan to you. «Chrome Disaster»’s appearing location and time specifics, you have no problem with that?”

“Y, yea. Leave it to me.”

“Umu. Then, I will be going.”

“I... I am leaving.”

“Okay, have a nice trip... Ah.”

Then she closed the door and after backing off a step, Kuroyukihime turned away.

January 23rd, Friday 7:30AM.

Up till now, the situation was similar to the many «going to school» moments he had daily. The grey light shining in the apartment public hallway, his white breath in the cold air, were all the same as yesterday's.

However just one thing was different - right beside him, wearing a neat Umesato middle school uniform with a blue ribbon tie, right

hand holding a school regulation bag, and left hand carrying a shopping bag, a female student's shape was there.

Turning on her Neuro Linker and looking in the air, Kuroyukihime said casually.

"Today will be cloudy, I hope it doesn't rain. Then, let's go."

"Y... yes."

He nodded, took his normal position to her left and slightly behind, and while walking, Haruyuki thought in a daze.

'- Ah... this person, is my onee-san? And the one earlier, imouto?

No no, this kind of specification should not exist in the real world. Going to school together with onee-san, like some antique novel game.

As he shook his head slightly, the empty elevator came down, and he went in after his onee-san.

'- Even if this was a game, with the girls being only «older sister» and «younger sister», that is not possible right?'

With his brain that wasn't working too well due to slight lack of sleep, he thought up to that point while spacing out, the elevator went down just two floors, and stopped on the 21st floor. Haruyuki backed up one step by reaction, to make space for people coming in.

And then, after the door slid open, with an energetic jump inside, a similarly uniformed girl - «childhood friend» Kurashima Chiyuri's eyes collided with his.

'NO - .'

As Haruyuki screamed in his mind, Chiyuri's large cat-like eyes blinked and a big smile appeared on her face.

"Ah, Haru, morning! How come today you are so early... wh... wha...!?"

However, once she recognized the person standing to the right side behind Haruyuki, her voice and expression changed abruptly. From relaxed, passed through surprise, then approaching right before an eruption.

“...Haru? What’s this?”

With her eyeballs jerking, Chiyuri whispered.

In contrast to the totally solidified Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime greeted her lightheartedly.

“Ya, morning, Kurashima-kun.”

“Ah, g..good morning.”

After she bowed in reflex, Chiyuri grabbed hold of Haruyuki’s necktie and shouted.

“What’s going on!!”

“...It, it’s not what you think.”

While Haruyuki shook his head, he used his hand behind him to start the Mailer program, asking help from the only person who could resolve this situation. That is, “Taku, I need help badly”.

“What isn’t what I think!!”

When more of the tough interrogation was about to continue, the elevator finally reached the first floor and the door opened.

Haruyuki took hold of Chiyuri’s shoulders, and turned her half way around.

“Th, there, let’s go to school! Let’s take classes, let’s return home and forget about this during the weekend.”

“Hey, don’t change the topic!”

He kept pushing the shouting Chiyuri’s shoulders from behind, passing between the wide eyed residents in the lobby and somehow exited to the front courtyard when a helpful sound came from behind.

“M... morning, Chii-chan. Morning, Haru. Mo... rn...”

“...Good morning, master.”

Then somehow, after reading his email and coming in a full dash, his comrade murmured to Haruyuki while blowing out large clouds of white breath in the cold morning air.

“...Haru. You seem like someone who likes stepping on tiger’s tails.”

“I don’t like it. I don’t like it at all.”

After replying, he turned the still yelling ‘Explain it!’ Chiyuri toward Takumu then released his hands from her shoulders.

Just like Takumu, he said to Chiyuri with a calm voice.

“Chii-chan, I was at Haru’s house yesterday too.”

“Wha...? What does that mean?”

Facing the suspicious face of a childhood friend and able to voice a clear explanation; that kind of smooth speech, Haruyuki could not imitate.

“A little problem dealing with that application occurred. We used Haru’s house as a conference room. But it got late and if a middle school student walking at that time was captured by the social camera, it would be troublesome. So without any choice, senpai had to stay over at Haru’s house. Isn’t that right?”

To Kuroyukihime who was asked that, fortunately she dutifully nodded.

“Well, that’s what happened. Don’t need to be strangely suspicious, Kurashima-kun.”

“...”

Chiyuri continued to be silent with a complex expression for a few seconds - .

Eventually, she said with a low tone.

“Again, that. Brain... Burst?”

She looked at the three who nodded together, then puffed up her cheeks.

“Somehow, I am not convinced! That’s just a game right? Then, why would you talk for so many hours about it!”

“It... it’s a game, but not just any game.”

After looking around the wide apartment courtyard to make sure no

one else was around, Haruyuki continued.

“I have told you before... that accelerated thinking and creating a different world from this one. That’s why, similar to reality, many problems occur...”

“...Muu.”

Chiyuri’s lips became sharp, and she murmured while looking unsatisfied.

“I do not believe that in the first place. Even if you say accelerate or whatever, I can’t imagine it. ...Then...I got it. If you let me see it, I will accept it.”

“Huh?”

To the wide eyed Haruyuki, Chiyuri said it like it was nothing.

“That game, can be copied and installed right? Let me have it too. Then I too will become, what was that, that... «Burst Linker».”

“Wha... whattt - !?”

That shout, came not only from Haruyuki but from Takumu and Kuroyukihime as well.

And then all three held their right hand in front of their face and waved it left and right.

“Im... impossible. Absolutely impossible.”

Haruyuki who leaked that truthfully, his round cheeks were pinched by Chiyuri.

“What’s that! Just hand it over!”

“No, I told you... that game needs aptitude.”

“I won’t understand that till I try!”

“But you are... ultra bad.”

At that moment, Chiyuri’s cat-like eyes shone.

“I see... you have the nerve. I get it, you will see! I will train too, and win over Haru and Taku in games!”

“Wha... whatt!?”

Haruyuki opened his mouth wide and saw a look of challenge shining in Chiyuri’s eyes. This, he often saw when he played with Chiyuri in the past, is the «won’t turn back after saying it» face.

While pulling Haruyuki’s cheeks to the limit like a flat rice cake - .

“After that, let me copy that Burst something!!”

After saying that she let go of Haruyuki’s cheeks, stuck her tongue out for a ‘Be -’, then the similarly aged childhood friend ran away at a tremendous speed.

“...Training huh.”

Haruyuki murmured that while rubbing his cheeks, then turned toward Takumu beside him.

Then, he bowed deeply.

“Sorry, Taku. I made you lie to Chiyu.”

Earlier, Takumu’s explanation to Chiyuri was not 100% the truth. When Kuroyukihime announced that she would stay over, the meeting was already finished.

Takumu smiled and slowly shook his head.

“...It’s okay.”

His expression was calm, but Haruyuki felt that it contained some self-deprecation, so he bit his lips lightly. Then, Kuroyukihime too said in a caring voice.

“Takumu-kun. Asking might be an intrusion... you and Kurashima-kun, still... that is...”

“Being back to normal...will take a long time.”

Takumu shrugged and looked towards the street tree canopy that had lost all its leaves.

“I did a lot of things. Or more like, we might never return to being boyfriend and girlfriend again. But... if it’s part of Chii-chan’s wish for me to be at her side, I think just that is fine.”

“Taku...”

Haruyuki tried to find the words he should say, however just at important moments, his throat was stuck. On his behalf, Kuroyukihime’s quiet voice said.

“If... you feel burdened, or if it interferes with your relationship with Kurashima-kun, you can erase it... the Brain Burst.”

Takumu’s eyes opened wide instantly.

However, he soon greatly shook his head left and right.

“No. I still, to you... and to Haru too, need to make amends for.”

“Y... you don’t have to. There’s nothing like that, Taku.”

This time, he said in reaction.

“I don’t desire any amends from you. Senpai should be the same. Brain Burst does not exist for that reason... that is, that software is...”

However, just there, Haruyuki’s poor vocabulary ended.

Takumu looked at him with pain filled eyes, then patted him on the shoulder.

“It’s fine, I too still enjoy «duels». Instead of that, master. I want to consult with you.”

He turned toward Kuroyukihime and continued with a serious sound.

“...Chii-chan’s possibility of being a Burst Linker, do you think it is really zero?”

Compared to the wide eyed Haruyuki, Kuroyukihime almost did not change her expression, she tilted her head with ‘Fumu’.

“...The first condition has been cleared?”

“Yes, it should be.”

Takumu instantly nodded.

The first condition for being a Burst Linker is «to wear the Neuro

Linker right after birth». Takumu's was from his parent's educational policy that is full of enthusiasm and Haruyuki's was used to remotely monitor him since both of his parents worked, their condition was fulfilled.

Chiyuri was raised in a family full of love, the newborn her had worn the Neuro Linker for a different reason from them. Chiyuri's father was treated for throat cancer, so it was difficult for him to produce a physical voice. That meant Chiyuri was raised while hearing her father's mind talk through the network.

Takumu did not explain that far and Kuroyukihime also did not ask.

“I see.”

After consenting, she looked toward the direction Chiyuri ran off to.

“Actually, the second condition... «Brain reaction speed» does not have a rigorous standard. There are people who were bad with VR games that have installed Brain Burst. However, making someone into a Burst Linker without confidence could be said to be a large gamble.”

“G, gamble...?”

To Haruyuki who repeated what he heard, Kuroyukihime gave him a look with meaning and nodded.

“Right now, Brain Burst's copy and install... that is the privilege of a «parent» making someone a «child», is limited to be only once. And that privilege, even if the installing failed, will be lost and never return.”

“O, once!?”

Haruyuki involuntarily shouted, then he hurriedly held his mouth. He lowered his volume, but continued in haste.

“B, but then, the number of Burst Linkers won't increase by much. The people who retired after losing all points and the new people who joined... would at best be even...?”

“That means, Haru.”

Takumu who already knew the «once rule», pushed his glasses up and said.

“I think the unknown administrator who manages Brain Burst, that the current number of people... about 1000 people is set as the upper limit. A limit to keep «accelerate» technology concealed, that is.”

“Th... that might be the case... but even as it is right now, the day that the secret will be found out will absolutely come right? Now Chiyuri almost knows about it. If... if that administrator is the developer, eventually the existence of Brain Burst will be exposed to the world and of course then the Neuro Linker would no longer be able to use accelerate function, if he operates while already factoring that in, that guy... what is his goal anyway?”

Haruyuki opened both hands and looked at Takumu and Kuroyukihime one after another.

“Since, we... don't pay to play the game. I have never seen any advertising either.”

For many net games in the world, their profit structure is mostly of two different types. Monthly fees or item sales to users for money, and a flood like spread of contracted business advertising in the game, one of those.

Brain Burst is unmistakably a net game and also with the «accelerate» technology, thus giving its users extraordinary privileges. With the price of zero, so no matter how you think of it, it does not fit.

Hearing Haruyuki's fundamental questions that were way too late at this time, Kuroyukihime had a slight wry smile.

“Thinking about it is useless, Haruyuki-kun. To know that, you have to reach level 10 and hear it from the developer directly. However, I can say two things in confirmation. First, like you said earlier, the accelerated world probably cannot continue as it is forever. Eventually its secrecy will be lost, and the time when all Burst Linkers disappear will come. And the other point... the day that we will pay the proper price for the special privilege of «accelerate» will come. Or maybe...”

What's ahead, did not come with a clear sound, it was stuck with slight trembling lips.

However, Haruyuki while blowing white breath in the cold morning air, seem to be able to see the short words.

‘- Or maybe, we are already paying for it.’

Kuroyukihime looked at Takumu with a short laugh.

“We went off topic. About Kurashima-kun... I think her chance of becoming a Burst Linker is pretty low, however there is worth in trying.”

“Re... really, master?”

To the wide eyed Takumu, Kuroyukihime nodded slowly.

“Her physical potential is not low. Her earlier dash had a superb speed.”

“Ah, she is in the track and field club.”

After Haruyuki’s supplement, she murmured ‘Fumu’.

“I see. ...For the brain, the circuits for moving the real physical body, is almost the same as the one for moving the virtual avatar. That means in Kurashima-kun’s case, her circuit ability might have fulfilled the required condition. The problem is her affinity with the Neuro Linker, which we can only try by force.”

“Aha... but she can’t even do mind talk.”

“For your case, you are way too specialized in the Neuro Linker side. Move your real body a bit more.”

Kuroyukihime looked away from the immediately silent Haruyuki toward Takumu.

“...Takumu-kun. If Kurashima-kun succeeds in installing Brain Burst, there will be a strong relationship between you two. As in «Parent and child». ...However, that does not always exist as a positive element, please remember that.”

Haruyuki could not immediately understand the quiet but strongly said words.

‘Not positive... that means minus element? Between Burst Linker «parent» and «child»?’

What does that mean? «Parent» guide, and «child» admire. There shouldn’t be a dark side to that, isn’t that right? Different from the parent and child relationship in the real world. The father who

threw away the crying young me and left the house, and the mother that doesn't look at my face, nor talk to me, totally different from those. The parent and child in the accelerated world - between Kuroyukihime and me, there is a strong bond.'

Haruyuki's body momentarily trembled, and looked into the eyes of Kuroyukihime who stood right beside him.

They, like usual, were filled with a gentle shine.

'- No. Deep inside, there's a somewhat sad... or more like, a fear like flash, that might just be me over thinking.'

In that instant, in Haruyuki's mind, since Kuroyukihime guided him to become a Burst Linker, a question he never thought about appeared.

'Who was Kuroyukihime's «parent»?'

"...Ah, that is."

When he fearfully started to say that, Kuroyukihime said as if interrupting him.

"Oh no, we have stood still and talked for too long. It's the time that if we don't hurry we might be late."

"Wha..."

He hurriedly looked in the sky, it was becoming bright past the low clouds.

"Uwa, it really is. If might be better to run a bit, Haru."

"Arg, spare me that."

As Takumu tapped him on the shoulder, and he shook his soft head, Haruyuki could not forget his earlier question.

While he chased after Kuroyukihime who was already walking quickly, he wanted to ask that question again, but somehow the words did not come out.

Rushing through the school gate right before the first morning chime, and determining that his Neuro Linker successfully connected to the Umesato middle school local net without a late

count, Haruyuki left the other two.

However, even during morning classes, one thought kept circling around in his mind.

‘Why did Kuroyukihime say that there is a bad side to «Parent child» relationship for Burst Linkers? And why did she look somewhat sad at that time.

I want to know. No matter what.’

After the second class was over, and confirming that the virtual blackboard had disappeared from his view, Haruyuki started his Mailer without hesitation. With short words [Can we talk right now?], he typed and sent in 2 seconds.

The reply came after 8 seconds. [Let’s meet at the local net virtual squash corner.], after reading that, Haruyuki sat deeply in his chair, closed his eyes and sang the Direct Link command.

Between the 2nd and 3rd classes there is only 15 minutes, so the fairy-tale forest that is Umesato middle school’s local net was quiet. After confirming that his avatar’s short legs touched the ground, he aimed for a large tree standing on the outer edge and dashed.

The leader of the bullies who forced Haruyuki to use the pink pig for avatar is no longer there, his underlings were now in hiding, so he could have changed to a more cool design anytime, but somehow did not have the chance, so he continued to use that. Kuroyukihime said ‘I like that also’ probably had influence on him.

With that shape he bounced up the stairs carved in the tree trunk, when he jump onto the top floor with the squash game, he saw a slender avatar standing quietly in the center of the court.

Deep black dress with silver edges. A similar colored parasol in hand, and on the back, black swallowtail butterfly wings with deep red lines running in them.

Kuroyukihime, who looked like a dark fairy princess, turned her almost colorless white face toward Haruyuki and lightly smiled.

“Hi. It’s been a while since I saw you in that shape. Lately we have just been talking in reality.”

“...Senpai hasn’t been to the local net much, the fans of that avatar

are feeling sad.”

With about three times smoother voice than reality he replied, and Kuroyukihime’s smile changed to a wry smile as she shrugged her shoulders lightly.

“Really, I was thinking of how eventually it would be nice to use a black pig avatar to match with you. ...Instead of that, what is it, that you want to meet and talk.”

“Ah... about that... that is.”

This time he faltered like usual, and Haruyuki tried to find the words.

Thinking about it, so far he had asked almost nothing about Kuroyukihime’s private matters. And now suddenly, he is doing something like stepping his foot inside.

To Haruyuki who hesitated after calling her out, Kuroyukihime showed a wry smile for a while, eventually the wings on her back waved as she moved. The bells on her parasol made a clear ringing chime.

“...Haruyuki-kun. What you want to ask about, is my «parent» right?”

Kuroyukihime murmured with a somewhat more mysterious silky voice than her actual voice.

Without waiting for Haruyuki’s reply after he took a breath, she continued with lowered long eyebrows.

“Sorry, but... right now, I cannot say that name. I don’t want there to be a chance of you contacting that person. For a legion master... and also as a girl. That might just be ugly jealousy.”

While his avatar stood frozen, and his eyes wide, in Haruyuki’s brain a few thoughts flashed in his consciousness.

With that speech, he understood some things. First, Kuroyukihime’s «parent» is still a Burst Linker existing in the accelerated world. And the other thing, is probably a female.

While moving around soundlessly on the squash court, Kuroyukihime’s voice continued like a harp’s low tones being

played with fingers.

“...That person, was... to me, the closest human being. Continuing to forever shine brightly in the center of my world, or in other words driving darkness and cold far away, I believed.”

‘- That is just like what you are to me’, Haruyuki thought in reaction.

“However, one day... at that time, that instant, I learned that it was a fleeting illusion. Right now that person could be said to be an existence as my arch enemy. Just like, this bottomless hate, was born the moment I met that person, I can only think of it like that.”

The voice was controlled to be calm, but the fierceness of those words, it was unbelievable that they came from Kuroyukihime. The lowered eyes took a quick glance at Haruyuki who stood still, and a somewhat hollow smile appeared on the deep black fairy princess.

“If possible, I want to fight with that person right now. I want to cut away her limbs with my sword, throw her on the ground, and while I enjoy her unsightly plead for life, cut off her head mercilessly. However that wish won’t be granted. ...Haruyuki-kun. Do you understand the conclusive difference between Burst Linker’s «Parent child» relationship, and the other for example «Comrade» or «Lover» kind of relationship?”

“...”

After a moment of confusion, Haruyuki remembered that fateful day three months ago, the shining thing that Kuroyukihime held out. That is, the silver colored direct connect cable.

“That is... «Parent child», without exception, know each other’s «reality».”

“Yes, that is exactly it.”

Nodding, Kuroyukihime stuck the tip of her parasol into the court.

“To copy and install Brain Burst, two Neuro Linkers must be directly connected. At that time, the «parent» and «child» must face each other in reality, and also have a relationship that allows direct connection. That means, Burst Linker «parent child» relationship is strongest bond in accelerated world... at the same time, the strongest curse is created.”

“Cu... curse...?”

“That’s right. For example when «parent» and «child»’s path differ, and they have a fighting relation, that hate will definitely expand to the real world. I... right now, even with this much hate could not fight my «parent». Because that person, in the real world, can use overwhelming influence on me. - The proof of existence for a Burst Linker is «duel». To fight each other, we put our mind inside a Duel Avatar. Even so, only a «parent» and «child» cannot fight. What would you say that is, other than a curse?”

“...Senpai.”

Haruyuki whispered that, and tried to find words to continue. However, he did not think he can put the feeling swirling in his heart all into sounds that will express them.

That’s why, he took a step, then another forward, and held Kuroyukihime’s left hand that was hanging down without any strength with his two round hands. For an avatar that is not supposed to have a temperature difference, that hand was freezing cold.

“Haruyuki-kun...”

The quiet voice was similarly cold.

Probably, Kuroyukihime now is still suffering from her hunt of Red King Red Rider, forcing him to forever retire. And then to conform to that action, she must continue to make herself turn her sword against many Burst Linkers. Even if the opponent is her own «parent», or - «child».

Her white hand touched his mouth, more like his big nose like pushing against it, as Haruyuki desperately tried to speak. ‘This is all I can convey to her right now’, while thinking that.

“I said it yesterday too. I will absolutely not fight with senpai. Never become senpai’s enemy. If, for some uncontrollable reason that became the case... before we fight, I will un-install Brain Burst.”

While the virtual sunlight came down the tree canopy with diagonal drawn lines, there was a long silence.

Eventually, Kuroyukihime’s voice with a bit of returned

temperature echoed, at the same time she hit Haruyuki's round head with her parasol.

"Fool, I should be the one to leave. You keep fighting. Compared to me, you who enjoy Brain Burst... «duel» way more, should stay in the accelerated world."

"No, absolutely no way!"

Then, with a light sound the parasol fell down to the blue carpet of fallen leaves.

On Haruyuki's face while he was screaming like a spoiled brat - .

Her right hand smoothly caressed.

When he lifted his head up, he was eye to eye with Kuroyukihime who knelt down at an unknown moment. At very closer range, her faint red lips moved.

"No matter what kind of future awaits us, I will never regret choosing you."

At the same time as her speech, her two hands extended and hugged Haruyuki's head to her.

That was supposed to be a heavenly moment, but from his almost burnt out sensory signals, Haruyuki felt that an indescribable loneliness floated through.

After school.

Kuroyukihime and Takumu said they would drop off their things at their house first, so Haruyuki returned home by himself.

He opened the front door while somewhat prepared for the worst, but today there were not any loud game sounds or any screams, so he said 'I am home' in a low voice and peeked in the living room, and saw the back of Niko sitting on the sofa.

She was so quiet that he thought she was asleep, but soon she waved her small right hand. Haruyuki who came around to the front, saw the girl looking at space with her wide open big eyes - that means she is busy with her virtual desktop, he determined.

"...I am home."

After saying it once more, Niko replied shortly with ‘Ou’, and instantly looked at Haruyuki.

“What about the other two?”

“They went home before coming here. It won’t be more than 20 minutes I think.”

“Okay, we should be able to make it in time... Chrome Disaster has not started to move yet.”

Haruyuki blinked to that speech. Somehow Niko with whatever method, can monitor the movement of «Disaster Armor» that is «Chrome Disaster» - the Red legion member «Cherry Rook» who was given that enhanced armament, for that purpose of course her Neuro Linker will have to be connected to the outside net.

“Y...you, are fine with connecting to the Global Net? Since this is not Red legion territory.”

To his involuntarily question, Niko showed a fearless smile.

“Earlier I was «challenged» by a daredevil once. I blew him away in 10 seconds, and told him to tell other guys not to bother me, so it should be fine.”

“Is... is that so...”

Inside a «territory», for the controlling legion’s members, while they are not set to accept fights, is given the right to reject «challenge» from other Burst Linkers.

That means, for Haruyuki’s group, at home and around their school is safe to connect their Neuro Linker to the Global Net, but of course that right is not given to Niko. However, thinking about it, only other Kings can win against the King Niko in a one on one fight, but they have a no invasion treaty with each other so they would not be suddenly challenged. Right now, the King who must always disconnect from Global Net when leaving their territory, is the one and only rebel Kuroyukihime.

Thinking up to that point, Haruyuki realized suddenly, that the red haired girl in front of him is a potential person who might subjugate Kuroyukihime.

While they are alone, he should confirm that, so Haruyuki coughed

and opened his mouth.

“Ah... that is, Niko-cha... Niko. Can I ask you one thing?”

“No. ...When you know I have no room for that reply, don’t have to be so polite. What is it.”

While he was being glared at, Haruyuki stood by the sofa, and asked in the most simple and straight way.

“Y, you, don’t hate Kuroyukihime senpai?”

“Huh? Why?”

Looking at the true blank stare, Haruyuki was also undauntedly amazed.

“Why, you said... that person has the highest reward on her head... even more the reason for that is from the previous King, that is the one before you, «Prominence»’s legion master being struck down...”

“Ah, you mean that.”

With a snort from her nose, Niko spread her small legs with cut jeans wide in front. While her right hand fingers twilled one of her red pigtails, she looked out the window.

“Nn, even if he was my master. I, with the previous generation... «Red Rider», never directly talked to him.”

“Wha... is, is that so?”

‘Niko’s «parent», is not that Red Rider?’ Haruyuki thought that and unconsciously asked.

“You see, I became a Burst Linker two and half years ago, and a few months later the previous King retired. I was only level 3 or 4 at that time, we have never dived together in the same field. When I heard that the master was sneak attacked by Black Lotus and lost all of his points, all I thought of was ‘Hmm, level 9 seems to be pretty serious’.”

‘Anyway’, Niko raised one eyebrow skillfully.

“In the first place, my booster equip rapidly raise through the ranks to become the next King was also after Lotus killed the previous King, and the Red legion was disbanded once. At that time Nakano

and Nerima were big warring states, every day group battles happened at an incredible pace, so I got lots of points here and there from that. Even if I am the strongest, without that it would have taken me at least two more years to become level 9.”

With Niko’s ‘keke’ laughter, Haruyuki was also drawn into a smile.

“I... I see. Then, Niko and the Red legion don’t have a reason to go after the Black King...?”

“Nnn~. To be exact, there are some in the old members that would. But, the ones who really won’t forgive Black Lotus, that burning group, after Prominence disbanded once, moved to other legions. Darn spineless bunch. They only talked about following the previous King’s will, if they really thought that way, then they should have worked hard to revive Prominence.”

She stopped there, looked up at Haruyuki with ‘What is it’ threat. After he hurriedly shook his head, she turned away, and opened her mouth after a bit of silence.

“...After that. That... absolutely don’t tell that girl.”

“O... okay.”

“I, in truth, about that girl... Black Lotus is an awesome, I think. For motivation.”

“Huh...!? Th, that, what does it mean...”

“Don’t tell her. Really don’t tell her.”

After a sharp glare at him, Niko continued in a quiet sound that did not match her violent language.

“The reason is, she is the only one among the «Kings» who seriously announced that she aims for level 10. The other Kings, including me, in the framework of no territory invasion treaty, just play duel. No, maybe worse, there might be people in the Kings that secretly aim for level 10. While saying ‘For the continuance of accelerated world’ to maintain the current situation, those lowest bastards who look for a chance to skip the line.”

“...You are.”

After hearing Niko’s monologue, Haruyuki asked in reaction.

“Which one are you, Niko.”

“...I don’t know.”

The reply was short, but it rang with truth.

The young King laid her too delicate body on the sofa, and held the back of her head with both hands. She extended her bare toes to right in front of Haruyuki, and kicked the air with rhythm.

“...The other Kings, especially «Purple» and «Yellow», said that the moment a level 10 Burst Linker appear, the game called Brain Burst will be «cleared». With a Panpakapaan fanfare, the developer will show up to say congratulations or whatever, and the ending roll will scroll... then all Burst Linkers’ Brain Burst will be forcefully un-installed, like that.”

“No...”

‘No way would it be like that, that there would be a net game where everyone’s ending is at the same time.’ He wanted to laugh and say that, but Haruyuki’s mouth froze.

He remembered this morning’s topic of talks with Kuroyukihime and Takumu. ‘- Someday the accelerated world’s secrecy will be lost, and the day of the game’s collapse will definitely come.’ The one who said that, was supposed to be Haruyuki himself.

Niko lightly nodded as if she read what Haruyuki was thinking of.

“I too, think it’s not something that’s 100% impossible. Actually, I don’t want to think about what will happen without Brain Burst. For me, it could be better said that side is the reality. But... even so, if it is okay to cling to it like this, I thought. The Seven Kings... not that, The Six Kings’ no invasion treaty might be distorting the accelerated world’s true shape. Due to that, right now many things happening make sense.”

“Di, distortion...?”

“For example, Chrome Disaster is also that.”

After those brief words, Niko closed her lightly red eyes.

“...Cherry Rook losing to the «Disaster Armor»’s lure was probably due to despair with the high level wall. Right now, the accelerated

world is stalled by the treaty, in the «Normal Duel Field», no matter how hard you work level 9... no, even level 8 will be hard to reach. There are no opponents. The reason I got to level 9, like I said earlier, was due to me taking advantage of a time of big confusion due to the incident with Black Lotus... that kind of thing, probably won't happen a second time. That's why right now, if you aim for higher levels, you must take risks and fight in the «Unlimited Field». Cherry reached for that «Armor» while thinking like that. And then, the one who pushed him to do that, in a certain sense is a King like me..."

Suddenly Niko strongly wrinkled her brow, and ground her teeth.

Looking at her thin chest shaking strongly twice and three times, Haruyuki involuntarily held his breath and whispered.

"Ni... Niko..."

"Shut up! Don't say anything! Don't Look! Go away!"

While lying on the sofa, her two feet kicked while she screamed, and Niko used her right hand to rub around her eyes.

Then suddenly her eyes opened wide, and she shouted like she was surprised by something.

"That's right!!"

"...Huh?"

"That's right, why do I tell you these things!! Hey forget it!! All of that stuff earlier was a lie!! If you don't forget it right now I will beat you up!!"

She shouted with a muffled voice, with her feet extended like she was about to kick, that Haruyuki stopped with both hands on reaction.

And then, like hugging them to his chest, he held those small feet tightly.

"Gyaaa, wh, what are you doing hentai!!"

"...Niko."

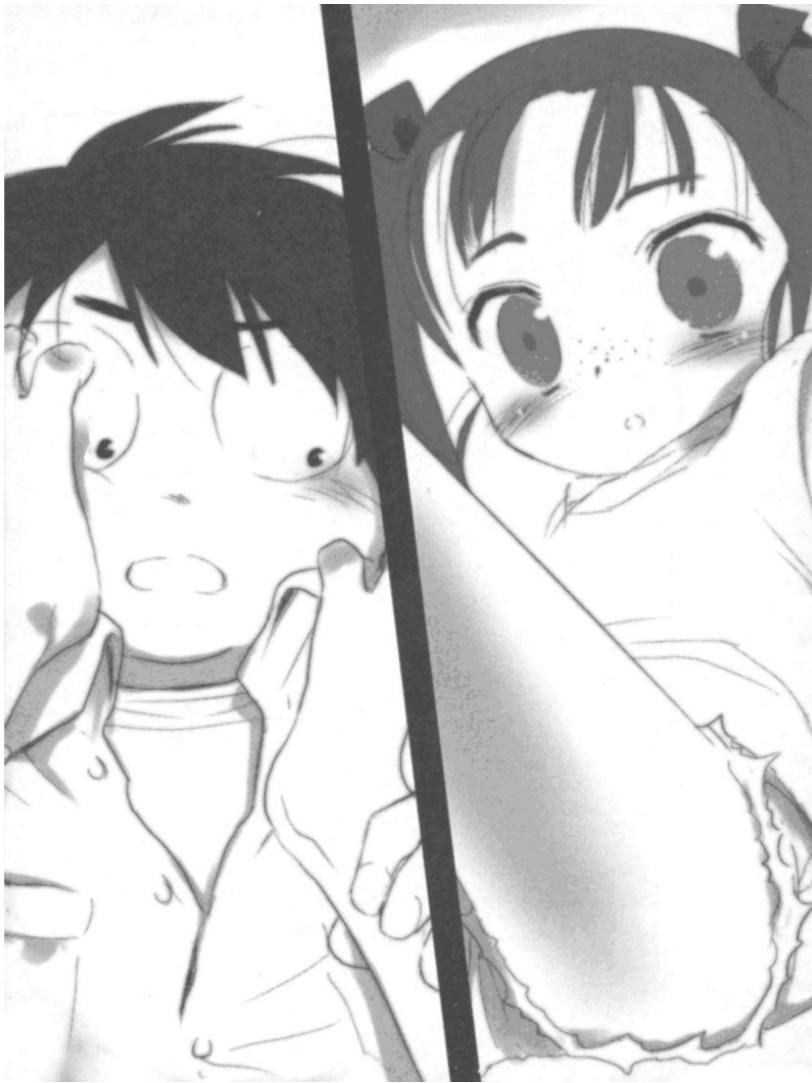
Despite the straight vocal abuse, Haruyuki put more strength into his hands. He really wanted to hold her hands, but if he did that

then getting hit would be the least of his worries.

“Niko, you are not wrong.”

At the moment Haruyuki said that, Niko’s violent movement of trying to take her feet back stopped still. Looked on by the big reddish brown eyes, Haruyuki desperately continued speaking.

“Not wanting the game to end, wanting to stay in that world forever, that kind of thinking is normal. But... I understand after playing mountains of net games till now. There is nothing more lonely or sad than the «termination» of a game without an ending. Net games where users got bored and moved to another one so they became unprofitable. One day they suddenly announce the termination of its operation, and without much talk the server is closed. I experienced that moment many times «inside». The familiar weapon shop oji-san[6] and the hotel onee-san while smiling forever «died», after seeing that and Link Out in my own room, I cried many times. That way of termination is wrong. Absolutely wrong.”



Niko was motionless, with her feet on his chest, both her wide eyes looking at him.

While his palms touch the thin skin, and felt the blood flowing inside, Haruyuki continued to speak in a raspy voice.

“If... if Brain Burst has an ending, we want to aim for that. Even if that will result in the loss of acceleration, compared to seeing the unreasonable «termination of the world», that’s a much much... more correct way.”

‘Because, that effort is our compensation to many others in what they paid for the game called Brain Burst. The brooding me, being

able to talk using my real voice for so long with a girl I don't know, is probably due to Brain Burst.'

He kept the last short thought in his heart, and Haruyuki closed his mouth.

Even in the silence, Niko continued to be motionless and quiet.

'Uwaa, I said something contradicting again', while Haruyuki was having a doleful feeling, the young King finally murmured briefly.

"Correct... huh. There actually is a Burst Linker who would say that."

Her eyes looking up settled on Haruyuki, and Niko showed just a little bit of angelic smile.

"You, are a strange guy. Actually, I was thinking of why a round and useless guy like you have the one and only «flight ability»... I feel that I might understand a little bit about that. But, leaving that aside."

There, her expression suddenly changed to a dark look, and Haruyuki extended his back in a shiver.

"...How long are you going to hold onto my feet, you super hentai! I will kill you!!"

The left foot that was thrust at the same time, exploded on his nose bridge, and Haruyuki fell backward helplessly.

Along with a heavy thump, the door chime's sound lightly echoed.

"I met with master there. Ah, here, a gift. I snatched it from home."

Takumu who showed the cake like box he was holding, saw Haruyuki sitting on the floor rubbing his nose, and Niko sitting on the sofa looking the other way, he tilted his head.

"...What happened?"

"Looks like they had a big fight. Nice nice."

Kuroyukihime held her hand at her uniformed waist while lightly laughing, and Niko also snorted.

“Well yea. You can say we are close enough to fight.”

Haruyuki hurriedly jumped in between the two that were releasing sparks.

“W, welcome you two! Taku, thanks for the gift! Let’s eat it, I want one with a strawberry on it!!”

He quickly got up, and moved towards the kitchen, then two voices came behind him at the same time.

“Strawberry is my/mine!”

“...Yes.”

Fortunately, the box contained two strawberry shortcakes and two chocolate cakes. So another fight did not start up again... ‘Is it okay for the cake not to be black?’ ‘Chocolate is not black, it’s just burnt brown.’ while with those back and fore - the four ate the first bite at the same time, and after a swallow of tea, Kuroyukihime’s expression changed.

“...tracking Chrome Disaster, did you do it?”

After being asked, Niko looked at her virtual desktop again and lightly nodded.

“Yes. He should be moving soon.”

That reply, made Haruyuki feel slightly uncomfortable.

Tracking a Burst Linker from long distance, how is that kind of thing possible? When a target’s «duel» start, if you dive in as gallery then you can find out where, but Niko did not seem like she accelerated earlier. Or maybe, legion masters can find out the real world location of a member, they could have that kind of outrageous privilege?

At that moment he wanted to ask, and opened his mouth -

At exactly that moment.

“...There!”

Niko shouted sharply, stuck her fork on her last bit that is the round strawberry, and put it into her mouth.

“Cherry got on the Seibu to Ikebukuro train line. With his pattern till now, today’s hunting ground is Bukuro.”

“Ikebukuro huh. That’s troublesome.”

‘Damn’, Kuroyukihime lightly clicked her tongue. She placed her fork in her empty plate with a clink.

“How should we move? We also can use trains or taxi in the real world... or maybe move through «inside»?”

Not understanding the meaning of those words, Haruyuki wrinkled his brow.

«Inside» probably means «Duel Field», it looked like it extended forever, but it’s actually an area with boundary lines that stop movement. Without that, after one hit, someone can keep running away forward till it timed up kind of battle tactic would be possible.

So, for example from this place - if they dive from Haruyuki’s home, their movement limit will just be to the northern end of Suginami, they will never reach Ikebukuro in Toshima.

However, after just thinking for a bit Niko replied clearly.

“Let’s go from inside. With these members, we probably won’t pull the «enemy».”

“...If we are lucky, that is.”

Kuroyukihime too, consented with a serious face.

While Haruyuki was dazed without understanding anything, he was caught by Kuroyukihime’s serious looking eyes.

“Then... Haruyuki-kun. I will tell you the command to dive into us Burst Linkers’ true battle field. It will use up 10 Burst Points, that won’t be a problem right?”

“Y... yea, if it’s just 10 points. Instead of that... t, true, battle field...?”

“Like the words said. Our «accelerated world» calling is based on that. Listen, sing the command right after me. Let’s go... the fifth Chrome Disaster subjugation, Mission Start!”

There she took a deep breath, and stretched her back straight - .

At the same time she pressed her Neuro Linker's Global Net connection button, the deep black beautiful princess, shouted with a dignified sound.

“Unlimited Burst!”

# Chapter 5

‘-Unlimited Burst!’

After he shouted that while preoccupied, the many times louder sound of accelerating hit his consciousness.

His view instantly became dark.

However, the darkness was soon pierced by silver light. That was the effect light that changed Haruyuki’s real body into a steel mechanical body.

Normal acceleration - with the «Burst Link» command, he would first become his pink pig avatar, that phase was now skipped and Haruyuki was changing into his pure silver duel avatar - «Silver Crow».

Right after that, the surrounding darkness was also blown away by rainbow light.

What appeared beyond the radiating aura was shining blue black steel.

The place that was supposed to be his apartment living room had become a cold metallic corridor like a demon king’s castle from a fantasy movie. The windows facing south were all gone, from the walls and pillars with many iron plates stuck on, like the design of heat releasing fins, many light blue flames were lit. Near his feet was a layer of thick fog, and the high ceiling sunk in a deep darkness that could not be seen.

The metallic part is very similar to the «Purgatory» stage, but there was not a single sign of disorder from life. Haruyuki looked around the cold straight scene that’s everywhere.

When he looked back around him, he saw three duel avatars standing there.

With Dark Blue armor and strong limbs, and the right hand equipped with a huge pile driver, was «Cyan Pile».

The Crimson colored and delicate statured one with only a handgun

on her, was «Scarlet Rain».

And then with a Pure Black, semi transparent armor and sharp sword-like limbs shining, was «Black Lotus».

Standing in the same place, with the two «Kings» was one thing, but even the same leveled Cyan Pile - Takumu made him feel inferior, he swallowed that and whispered.

“...This is the «Unlimited Neutral Field»...”

“That’s right.”

After confirming with electronic effect like sounds, Kuroyukihime lightly turned around. Black Lotus that became all sharp endpoints, did not walk normally, she moved while slightly hovering above the floor.

With the right hand that was a large blade similar in size to her leg, she pointed past the corridor.

“That is probably the exit. It’s faster if you see for yourself.”

“That’s true. Let’s go.”

Scarlet Rain - Niko nodded too, while her twin pigtail antenna moved up and down.

After walking in the steel passage covered in thick fog for a bit, their destination was filled by white light from outside. Haruyuki involuntarily walked faster and passed the other three, then took a left turn and opened his eyes wide.

The place that was originally the apartment east street side wall, had became a fully open outside terrace. He was currently at a height that was similar to his 23rd floor home, so he could see everything outside the terrace.

Dreadful - is the only thing that could describe the scene.

The sky was covered with many thick grey clouds. Between them, frequent blue violet lightning passed through.

And then on the ground, similar to Haruyuki’s apartment, were buildings designed with sharp steel plates stuck on like objects. Right in front, the hazy fog covered Shinjuku, was no longer crowded with tall buildings, but was now like a fortress filled with

an evil army. No matter how he looked, there was not any movement. As if it was totally uninhabited.

Demonic city, while those words appear in his mind, Haruyuki asked Kuroyukihime who stepped out beside him.

“It’s the first time I’ve seen this kind of field. Here, the attribute is...”

“It’s «Chaos».”

After that short answer, she turned her eyes shining with violet light towards Haruyuki and added.

“You will eventually understand what that means. Instead of that, Haruyuki-kun. Looking at the scenery is fine, but there is something else that you should realize quickly.”

“Wh... what?”

While Haruyuki hurriedly looked around, he finally saw what he was supposed to.

Up till now in duel fields, normally in the upper part of his view is shown his own and his enemy’s HP bars, right between them is the remaining time count starting from 1800 seconds. However right now, there is only his HP bar, and there is no countdown number.

So far, the game application «Brain Burst» that Haruyuki experienced were, detailed fields that could only be thought of as reality, with perfect real five senses feedback that is ultimate technology, but the content was an old style one on one fighting game. At the moment he arrived at this «Unlimited Neutral Field», the graphics design only changed slightly, but he felt that the game suddenly changed clothes and became a cutting edge large scale network game, so he involuntarily shouted.

“Th, there isn’t any remaining time...!? What does this mean...?”

“Exactly what it seems.”

The one who answered, was Niko who came up on his left side.

“Here, there is not a dive time limit setup. That’s why it’s «Unlimited».”

“Wha.”

Again losing his words, Haruyuki desperately tried to think about the meaning of what he heard.

“...Th, that is. We, «Accelerated» right?”

“Of course, that’s right.”

Kuroyukihime’s reply made his thought turning fully again.

Brain Burst accelerated its user’s thinking by 1000 times while in a full dive in a virtual field. That’s why, even if the normal acceleration limit of 30 minutes are all used up, in the real world it would only have been 1.8 seconds.

However, with no limit, that means.

If just 10 minutes of real time is spent in this «Unlimited Neutral Field», that would be a length of 10,000 minutes - that is about 166 hours, which is around 7 days.

Then, if he spent a whole real day...

After he calculated with his fingers, Haruyuki murmured with a raspy voice.

“Th... three years...”

‘Oh my god’. That is about equal to forever in time. That means, if he uses the command «Unlimited Burst», no matter how much homework he left behind, or slack off on studying for a test...

“You should not do that, Haru.”

At that moment, as if he perfectly traced Haruyuki’s brazen thoughts, Takumu said behind him.

Turning around, he saw the avatar’s muscular shoulders shrug, and his friend continued with a sound containing laughter.

“I too, came here just once before. At that time I was as excited as you are, also since 10 Burst Points were used, I thought it would be a waste to go home soon, so I spent 3 days inside. When I returned to reality, I had forgotten all about what I was going to do before accelerating, it was awful.”

“That’s right, Haruyuki-kun. With just 3 days you can get away with forgetting what you were going to do, but if you spend 1 month, or

half a year in here..."

Saying till there, Kuroyukihime's tone of voice became serious.

"- when you return, *your personality would have changed*. Of course, compared to yourself up to that point, at worse your soul's age would differ too. If you don't want your family or friends to look at you with puzzled faces, you should not come here too often."

At the instant he heard that speech, one awaken voice rang in his mind.

'- If you knew how much time that girl and I spent in the accelerated world...'

Yesterday, Niko said that with laughter. The meaning of that, which is - .

However before he can think ahead, he was lightly hit on the back by that person.

"Instead of that, it's time to move. At the time we accelerated, it would be still two real minutes before the train Cherry is on arrives at Ikebukuro, so we still have time though."

"Y, yea. Moving... that is to Ikebukuro right."

Two minutes of real time is over 33 hours in the accelerated world. While he thought that might be way more time than needed, Haruyuki moved his view towards the northeast direction.

Beyond the blue black steel city that extended far away, he could make out a lightly floating huge structure. If that is Ikebukuro's Sunshine city, the distance there should be about 6km, similar to the real world.

"Let see... do we walk? Or run...?"

"No way. Why do you think we have you here?"

"Huh? That means..."

In front of the dumbfounded Haruyuki, the pitiful crimson avatar held her hands together in front of her chest and tilted her head.

"Carry me and fly, onii-chan!"

Haruyuki used his «Punch» and «Kick» to destroy the objects of deformed statues and iron bars set on the open terrace, and after his special gauge was maxed, he turned around while saying ‘Let see...’.

There, were shapes of two Kings looking at him sharply.



“He will carry me, since I have these arms. You can dangle below Silver Crow’s legs.”

“Stop joking! Why do I have to do that humiliating thing? It is your avatar’s design fault, you go ride the train by yourself!”

Between the two with sparking flashes that were not an expression but was really there, Takumu sighed and interrupted.

“Then, let’s do this. Master on Haru’s right arm, and Red King on his left arm, have him carry you like that. And then I will dangle on his legs. Will that work, Haru?”

“Ah... y, yea, probably. I can’t put out much speed though.”

Moving to the front of the still unsatisfied Niko and Kuroyukihime, Haruyuki first extended his right hand.

“Ex, excuse me.”

He tightly held Black Lotus’ slender waist which had a lotus flower like armor skirt below, next he used his left hand to hold Scarlet Rain’s even more delicate body.

Without a fragment of mental space for a ‘Yay, a flower in both hands’ kind of thought, Haruyuki slowly put strength into his shoulder blades, and opened up the metallic fins folded on his back.

The wings that spread apart with a clear sound, soon released a light flapping sound. The virtual lift that was created made them float above the ground.

He slowly rose, when he was about 1.5m above ground, he hovered.

“Taku, it’s okay now.”

“Yoroshiku, Haru.”

Soon, Cyan Pile’s strong arms held onto around his calf area.

“Then... we are going!”

With his announcement, Haruyuki shook the fins with all his strength.

Three extra people’s weight was a lot, but he still managed to accelerate and fly towards the sky. The steel terrace was left farther and farther behind, and the uninhabited, deformed city opened up wide below.

“Oh... oh, incredible...!!”

In his left arm, Niko shouted.

“You are really flying! That is Seven Ring[7]... that is central train line huh. Wonder if I can see my school!”

For Haruyuki, it was all familiar scenery. Even within the Normal Duel Field’s movement limit, he could still see not just Tokyo, but the whole district of Kanto.

However, no matter how many times he saw it, the feeling that welled up in his heart never seemed to thin. More than anything, this «Unlimited Neutral Field», according to Kuroyukihime’s explanation, is limited by the social camera network range - that meant it continued all the way to the edge of Japan.

That is a scale that could no longer be called a game map. It is another world.

“I see... this huh.”

Haruyuki unconsciously whispered.

“This is the true «Accelerated World» right. Always existing beside the real world... not an instant, but a permanent world...”

“That’s right.”

That short murmur, was from Kuroyukihime he held in his right arm. From the sharp shape, shining eyes turned towards Haruyuki and her strict yet kind voice flowed.

“And this is Burst Linker’s true battle field. If you aim for level 9, eventually you will have to fight here, and win. ...Well, right now is not that time yet.”

Does that mean his level is too low, or Haruyuki himself does not have enough ability?

Realizing that a bit of impatience pricked at his chest, Haruyuki lightly nodded.

“Yes... In, instead of that...”

“Nn? What is it?”

“Since this is a permanent map, that means, at this moment other than us, there are other Burst Linkers who dived in here right?”

“Of course.”

It was Niko who answered him. Haruyuki changed the way he was facing, and asked another question.

“B, but, if that is the case... I don’t seem to sense anyone else...”

The deformed city below was filled with cold silence, and he could not see any movement. Haruyuki thought it would be like the usual duel field, with duel avatar shapes here and there, so what does this mean?

However soon, this time it was from Takumu dangling on his legs that made a sound.

“Haha, that’s of course, Haru. The total number of Burst Linkers is around 1000, so at any one time the number of them that dive in this Unlimited Neutral Field is at most 100 people. Even saying it like this, for places like Suginami that does not have anything, not seeing anyone is a matter of course.”

“Th, then... if we head towards the city center...?”

“That is exactly it. That’s why we, and also «Cherry Rook» are aiming for Bukuro.”

At the same time she said that, Niko knocked on Haruyuki’s helmet head.

“Instead of that, if you keep floating and don’t move, your gauge will disappear.”

“Ah, y, yea.”

Haruyuki checked the small blue shining special attack gauge bar below his HP bar. Hovering does not use up a lot of the gauge, but it already lost about 10%.

“Then, we will be taking the direct route.”

With that announcement, Haruyuki again increased his wing’s vibration rate.

Right below the hanging black clouds, he moved forward like sliding. Soon they passed the empty Seven Ring and entered Nakano.

When his eyes captured the elevated central train line supported by awfully sharp pillars, he looked ahead casually. He saw something

unexpected and murmured.

“Ah... Th, the train is moving...!?”

On the black shining rails, just made up of only two cars, there really was a train shaped long small shadow moving with heavy sounds towards the direction of Shinjuku.

“You can really ride it. It will cost points though.”

Hearing Kuroyukihime’s somewhat fun explanation, under the silver armor his eyes opened wide.

“Wha... wh, who is driving it!?”

“Fufu, you should check it out yourself someday.”

While they were chatting, the train line was left farther and farther behind, in exchange he could see Yamate street. After they pass that, they will arrive at Mejiro, and then Ikebukuro.

In the real world, Haruyuki usually went there to buy old styled game software and paper media books, but access to it from Suginami is unexpectedly bad. Either he took the train to Shinjuku and left from there, or rode the bus from Kouenji, both ways are right angle movements so it took time.

‘If I can fly like this it would be fun’, while he was thinking those carefree thoughts, at that time - .

“Hey, Haruyuki-kun. Look at that.”

Kuroyukihime who was riding on his right arm, pointed with the tip of her sword towards the east side.

Haruyuki who looked that way casually, his overwhelming shock almost made him drop the two Kings he was carrying, so he hurriedly held them tighter.

“Uwaaa... Wha... what...!?”

On Yamate street where deep fog flowed, there was a huge slow moving shadow. It could only be said to be strange looking. Its full body form was like a four legged beast, but its body was flat like a stingray, and where the head was supposed to be, many tentacles dangled to the ground. At the end of long strong legs, like on a bug, two brutal looking sharp claws extended.

And then its large size, no matter how you look at it, was about the height of a three storey building. Taking over three car lanes of road below, it slowly moved south.

When its feet touched the ground, a ‘Booom’ like low sound shook the air, while feeling that, Haruyuki whispered in amazement.

“What is... that?”

“It is an «enemy». Created by the system, it moves, and is this world’s resident.”

Continuing after Kuroyukihime, Niko blew a short whistle.

“Seeing one that big all of a sudden, you are lucky. But, don’t approach too close to it. If we become a target of that class, even these members won’t be able to handle it.”

“Target... you said, what, it will attack us!?”

“The meaning of the word ‘enemy’, you should have already learned it in middle school.”

He did not have time to retort to Niko’s bad mouthing, as Haruyuki hurriedly gained altitude. The strange looking huge beast did not seem to notice the people looking from above, and slowly continued to walk.

“Wh... why is that dangerous thing setup...”

“Why, you ask... that is...”

Kuroyukihime’s reply faltered. Niko and Takumu too seemed to show they lacked the answer, so Haruyuki tilted his head.

Then, Takumu who was dangling on his legs shouted with an undertone.

“Ah, there, it’s just starting. The «Hunt».”

“Hu... hunt...?”

Right after that, the huge beast passing right under them suddenly roared, and Haruyuki jumped a few meters.

“Uwaaa!?”

The beast stood up on its two hind legs, and while the tentacles on its head violently shook, it roared again. However its opponent was not them, as Haruyuki soon realized.

Farther south on Yamate street, there were many small shadows.

At first he thought they were other «enemy», but he soon realized that was not the case. The many colored armored humanoid silhouettes - must be Burst Linkers.

The large size person standing at the front raised its right hand and brought it down.

At that moment, from the roof of buildings to either side of the street, many beam lines and actual ammo ballistic curves were sent, which exploded around the huge beast's head.

The huge body of the «enemy» was momentarily staggered, then with a 'Yuooon' roar, its head turned towards one of the buildings. While its front legs scratched the air, it started to move forward with earth tremors.

However, right before the huge body crashed into the building, the Burst Linkers taking formation on the road all released mid range attacks at the same time. The beast that stood while covered by many explosions roared in anger and changed its target, charging towards the people standing on the road.

“Ah, danger!”

Haruyuki shouted involuntarily. The huge beast's front leg came down from far above, the one that looked like a leader was stepped on in one fell swoop and crushed - that was what it looked like, but the blue silver heavy armored duel avatar stopped the huge claw with his crossed arms.

Even so it did not seem like they want to stop the beast and fight it there, while he guarded the people the rampaging huge beast was attacking, he slowly backed off.

After pulling it a far enough distance away from the two buildings, from the rooftops all weapons were fired again, hitting the base of the huge beast's tail. While the beast turned slowly to head for the building on the eastern side, this time the group on the ground chased it for close range attacks.

“That’s a pretty nice party. The hate(AGGRO) control is good. Who is that leader?”

To Kuroyukihime’s impressed question, Niko answered.

“It should be a management member of the Green legion. But that party seems to be made up of random people.”

With that conversation, Haruyuki finally understood what the fight occurring below him was for.

“I, I see... those Burst Linkers are not attacked by that monster... They are going after it to kill it right.”

“That’s right. That is a «hunt».”

“That means, if they kill it, experience points... not that, Burst Points...?”

“Umu, exactly that.”

After Kuroyukihime nodded, Niko knocked on Haruyuki’s head.

“Even you should have understood by now. The reason enemy exist in this Unlimited Neutral Field, that also is the reason why this field exists. Not just from normal duels, Burst Linkers can hunt here to level up as well. But...”

“...That efficiency, is significantly worse compared to duels. That class of large size beast, even hunting with the risk of full annihilation, is similar to winning a duel with a same level once... that is about 10 points are gained.”

Kuroyukihime who continued the explanation, paused there, and lightly shook her flowing form mask.

“That is something that could not be helped. Hunting enemy in this world, is an act of creating Burst Points from nothing. That means, for the «Duel fighting game» that is Brain Burst, originally hunting in the Unlimited Field is just a method of supplementing points. However right now, that became about the only way that high level can be reached. The reason is...”

“The mutual no invasion treaty... right.”

Haruyuki murmured.

“For high level Burst Linkers, even if they want to duel normally, they cannot strike in other legions’ territory. For that reason also, the weekend «Territory battle», due to the treaty cannot function...”

Haruyuki looked away from the fierce battle occurring far below him, and again started moving northeast, below him Takumu said in a thoughtful tone of voice.

“Master, but... to be exact, there is another way right. Getting points with high efficiency in this current situation, the method to get pass the high level barrier.”

“What? Taku, that is...?”

“What I mean is... in this world, you can hunt another target other than «enemy». In addition, a prey that has way more points...”

After thinking for an instant, Haruyuki took a sharp breath.

“I, I see... earlier... instead of the huge beast, those people...”

He glanced back, far south behind them, he could still faintly see the cloud of continuous fire fight.

The short silence was broken by Kuroyukihime’s quiet voice.

“That is exactly it. For normal duel, the high level Burst Linkers that usually do not leave their own legion territory, and even if you want to challenge them you cannot, but in this place you can attack them as you like. Moreover you can ambush, sneak attack, anything you like.”

“And then, the one who is doing exactly that, is «Cherry Rook»... no, «Chrome Disaster».”

Niko murmured that in a low voice, her crimson round eyes were fogged as she looked straight ahead.

They had already passed Mejiro street that was one of seven radiating roads, and the center of Ikebukuro is straight ahead. The palace surrounded by strange steel spires that seem to swallow the deep black roads, from there was the JR<sup>[8]</sup> Ikebukuro station. East of that extended a huge sky corridor, linked to the skyscraper fortress standing a little further away- Sunshine City.

At the base of the corridor stood some small buildings, and he

seemed to be able to see different kind of lights blinking.

‘Are those just light effects? Or maybe it is actually similar to the real Ikebukuro, with a wide shopping center?’

While thinking he unconsciously forgot their current situation and tried to move there, but Niko’s right hand pulled his head back.

“Whoa, stop here. It will be a long time before Cherry comes here, but just in case let’s go to the ground. Flying around will be easily seen from below.”

“Well, that is true... however even if you say Ikebukuro, it’s a big area. Do you know where he will appear?”

To Kuroyukihime’s question, she snorted.

“If it’s the same pattern till now, it will be around Sunshine City. Circle around the south side, and just pick a building to descend onto.”

Haruyuki did as he was told and changed his body direction to head east.

He could see the fortress pointing to the sky on his left front side. To the right side, there is a gaping open hollow-like place. In the real world that should be the south Ikebukuro park, however there is not any type of trees, it was like a huge meteor crashed into it, making it have a crater like bleak feeling.

“...Then, we will descend near that empty ground.”

While saying so, Haruyuki checked his little remaining special gauge, determined that they will barely make it, and moved his wings.

Slowly, the four people weight started to move forward -

At that moment.

“Haru!!”

Near his feet, Takumu shouted.

Haruyuki who looked down in reaction, what his eyes captured, were bright orange firing lines extending up from between the buildings on the ground.

“...!!”

Without even time to scream, Haruyuki on reaction fully dashed towards the right front.

‘Jyaaa!’

With the sound of air being burned, he felt a huge heat wave going by near his back. He felt some frizzing pops on the tips of his wings that did not have any pain sensors.

However he ignored it, and again slid in the air, this time to the left side. Because he saw the second volley of fire from the ground. Moreover, its color is different from the first attack.

Right after the blue white ray was also dangerously dodged, Kuroyukihime lowly shouted.

“Could it be... Chrome Disaster?”

Against that, even though tense, Niko’s reply voice also has a dumbfounded echo.

“There is no way... it’s way too early, before he appear, there should still be a full day’s worth of time here! Also, that guy doesn’t have this kind of skill...”

Those two’s conversation was overwritten by Haruyuki’s scream.

“Descending!!”

Since, from the buildings on the ground, the third attack - this time he could see multiple lights. Those are not direct line lasers, but are actual ammo, moreover probably are tracking missiles’ firing lights.

Haruyuki stopped all of his wing’s lift, and descended almost like falling. However if he descend straight down, they will instantly be captured by the mysterious enemy. He spread his wing straight, and while sliding in the air like a glider, he aimed for the huge crater in front.

“Here they come! Missiles!”

With a tongue clicking sound, Niko bended over in Haruyuki’s arm and pulled out her handgun.

‘Dadadan’, that crisp continuous gun fire sound echoed, and many

small sized explosion sounds also roared. However, just one handgun cannot shoot down all the missiles, the few missiles that passed through the flames and closed in -

“...Yaaa!”

Were mowed by Kuroyukihime’s left hand sword strike and cut apart.

After a bit more distance apart, more explosions occurred. Using that pressure wave, Haruyuki cut through the last few ten meters, and flew at full speed towards the center of the circular crater.

First, Takumu released his arms, and landed while gouging the ground. Right after that, from his left and right arms, the two Kings jumped off, and lightly landed on the ground.

After falling in an awkward mess in between the three, Haruyuki hurriedly jumped up. With a quick glance, he checked his HP bar, luckily only less than 3% was lost. Kuroyukihime and the others should not have been directly hit either.

In the center of the huge hole filled with numerous radiating cracks, Haruyuki’s group breathed a sigh of relief.

As if the continuous attacks a few seconds ago were lies, the world returned to silence. Far up above in the black clouds, flashes of lightning making thunder sounded, and the wind blowing sound lightly echoed.

Then - .

With a small foot step sound, on the crater’s west edge, one shadow appeared.

It was a Burst Linker. Without a doubt it was probably one of the people attacking them earlier. Since it was mostly a silhouette, Haruyuki could not determine its color.

“That... is the person who attacked us earlier...?”

Haruyuki whispered in a sound that could barely be heard.

However, just one second later.

Right next to that, a second shadow appeared without a sound. And then a 3rd, and a 4th too.

“Wh... what is going on...”

Takumu’s light murmur, was about at the same time as the sound of many foot steps’ echo.

Looking up, Haruyuki saw that the crater’s edge, left, right and every which way was filled with avatar’s shadows. Large sized, small sized, long ranged, and close ranged, their abilities differed, but they had one thing in common.

That is their feel. Their looks filled with overflowing battle intention, silently looking at their prey - a hunter’s feel.

The total number of Burst Linkers that appeared was around 30 people. And then finally, passing between the circle gathered at the crater’s outer edge, an avatar with the strongest presence appeared.

Long and slender. With a height probably taller than Cyan Pile, however its four limbs were delicate like Silver Crow’s. The humanoid shape almost looked like it was made up of bones, only widening at the shoulder and hip.

The head was covered with a hat that is shaped like horns on either side that was small and curved. Large balls at the tip of those horns wavered without a sound. And then the face was covered with a mask that had a laughter on it.

“Clown...?”

Haruyuki unconsciously whispered. That avatar’s silhouette is very similar to the joker drawn on playing cards. However that mask did not have a single bit of humor. The long small eyes that slanted upwards were ash white in the shadow of backlight, filled with a cruel light.

Then, suddenly part of the clouds above thinned. The weak grey sunlight reached the ground, and showed the shape of avatars surrounding the crater.

Many different colors. However, to say it strongly, most were red and yellow.

The one that shone especially brightly, was the loosely standing in the center of that group, the clown avatar’s armor.

Without a single part of cloudiness, a poisonous yellow like

uranium ore. At the moment he saw that, a strong sense of terror ran through Haruyuki's back. There are not many duel avatars with that degree of fresh color saturation. Up till now the ones he'd seen directly were darkness deep black, and flame crimson, only those two. That means -, that means that clown is...

As if supporting Haruyuki's imagination, the crimson avatar standing beside him let out a dry sound.

“«Yellow Radio»... «Yellow King»... Why is he here...”

King. Only 7 of them existed in the accelerated world, level 9 Burst Linkers.

Up till now for Haruyuki, never mind the Yellow King, he did not even have contact with members under that King's control. The reason is the territory under Yellow legion's control, are on the opposite side of Suginami in the Tokyo area - from Ueno to Akihabara. When he went to Akihabara to buy old PC parts, he always disconnected from the Global Net at those times.

That means right now the Yellow legion being in Ikebukuro, and moreover in these numbers, is extremely unnatural. Of course it was not a coincidence. However, the time since Haruyuki's four person group dived from his apartment home with «Unlimited Burst» command into this Unlimited Neutral Field till now, only a few seconds at most should have passed in the real world. For their legion member to discover Haruyuki's group inside, contact the outside, and gather those members in Ikebukuro, there absolutely won't be that much time for it.

That means, they had also monitored Cherry Rook's movement, and predicted that at this time, this place, Haruyuki's group will appear, so they waited in ambush.

If that was the truth, then there is only one reason.

Everything. Everything from the cause of this situation, is their -

“...It's you bastard!!”

Suddenly, Niko roared.

The Red King who reached the same conclusion at the same time as Haruyuki, jumped out one step, held her fists, stuck out her chest, and her youthful shout was filled with majestic lion roar.

“You bastard planned all of this, Yellow Radio!!”

That’s right. It could only be that.

After being showered with the inferno of accusations, however the Yellow King’s thin body did not seem to be affected.

Unexpectedly, the bone like right arm slowly moved. Extending it wide to the right side, and turned the palm upward.

“Hey hey, thought I saw some dizzily flying insect fall down, it’s this unexpected guest? Good day, Red King.”

What came from the smiling mask, was a fresh, flowing young man’s voice. However, it was like it had an effect with extreme compression encode, so the sound was filled with various poisonous taste.

“Still saying that after the ambush...!”

“I do not seem to understand what you mean? I just, for my cute subordinates who were attacked after breaking the no invasion treaty, someone in the red legion who is forcing them to lose all points, I only came to ask for responsibility right? Recently, that duel avatar that rampages in defiance in our territory is quite troublesome.”

The horns on the hat made with many metallic rings swayed slowly. It was almost as if he was suppressing laughter.

On the other hand, Niko’s right index finger was pointed straight forward, as she shouted like a fiery explosion.

“It was you who made him do that! To lure me to this place, you gave that hidden «Disaster Armor» to Cherry Rook... it was you who instigated his violation of the treaty and indiscriminate attacks!!”

“Hidden? Gave? What bad words... that «Armor» was supposed to have been annihilated long ago right? Did your subordinate make another one?”

While saying that with a throaty voice, this time he extended his left arm, while he pointed to the sky with strangely small and sharp fingers, the Yellow King continued.

“In the holy treaty between the Kings, there is something like this.

If attacks in violation of the treaty was carried out, and that caused the legion member's forceful Brain Burst uninstall, then from the attacker's legion, someone will be picked to suffer the same fate, that. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth... in truth a savage revenge method right?"

'Kuu. Kuukuuku.'

Then, this time actual laughter leaked from the inverted triangle and sharp horned mask. The up slanted eyes shone lightly with the laughter.

"However, it is decided... isn't that right? Here, if a King like me ignored the treaty, then more and more similar violators will appear. So without any other choice, that's why came all the way to the frontline like Ikebukuro. To find one Red legion member, to make him pay for his comrade's crimes, right? However... is this perhaps another trick of fate...?"

The Yellow King put his hands one his waist, and leaned forward as he continued with a cool yet obscene voice.

"That person, *by chance* to be the Red legion's leader... «Scarlet Rain» herself."

'- No way it's by chance!'

Haruyuki shouted inside as he ground his teeth.

The number of avatars around the crater's edge is around 30. Even for a King's legion, that should be about the upper limit number that can be moved in a week day evening. And that goal, can only be for hunting the strongest existence, a «King».

The Yellow King predicted Scarlet Rain - Niko would act this way. That for Niko's personality, she would personally use «Judgement Blow» to purge her subordinate Cherry Rook for his crimes, and would appear in the Unlimited Neutral Field like this.

No, not only that. To force Niko into that situation, *he wanted to legally hunt one of five heads that will make him a level 10* - for that goal, the Yellow King gave the enhanced armament «Chrome Disaster» to a Red legion member. He could only think of it like that. If that is the case, that means.

"...Two and half years ago, when the fourth was put down, at that

time it was the Yellow King who hid the dropped «Armor»..."

Haruyuki unconsciously whispered. However there wasn't any proof. If he used that conjecture here, it would be a pointless argument.

Niko probably realized that as well, and while she remained silent, her fists shook violently.

Eventually she opened her hands, and let them dangle down. Her controlled flat voice flowed from the bottom of the crater.

"In the treaty, this should have also been written. «...Anyone can be selected for revenge, but if the legion master purge the criminal, causing him to lose all points then that won't apply»... that guy, I will deal with Cherry Rook. Then you don't have any complaint against that right."

"Please do, please do."

Opening both hands, the Yellow King, Yellow Radio say joyfully.

"If you can manage to do that! I heard a rumor on the wind... the other day, you tried exactly that, and you failed superbly... was it that you even suffered an unsightly time up loss? You are free to challenge him again, however... where is that certain person called Cherry Rook?"

As if on purpose, he moved his head covered by the huge hat left and right as a show.

"We don't have much free time. For someone that you don't know when he will appear, you don't want us to wait here for days right? If you can't deal with it right now... then we just have to use you to fill in right...?"

"Kuu..."

Niko growled in chagrin.

For Haruyuki's group, with Niko's long distance surveillance they found out when Cherry Rook was moving in the real side and accelerated, however there is a time lag before the actual person will appear in the Unlimited Neutral Field. Even with a few minutes of real time lag, in the 1000 time accelerated world, the difference at worse would be over one day. As the Yellow King said, capturing

Cherry Rook right now is impossible.

After deciding, Haruyuki took a step forward, and whispered lightly behind Niko's back.

"It's useless, Niko. That guy set a trap to go after you from the beginning so he won't let you escape... here, we should just leave for now. Log out, and wait for the next chance..."

"Can't."

The answer was instant and simple.

"That is not possible in the system way. In the Unlimited Neutral Field, instant log out is not possible."

"Wha..."

In the speechless Haruyuki's ears, the murmur from Takumu who moved forward reached him.

"That is the way it is, Haru. To exit this place, you have to go to Leap Points placed in various locations. Even if you «suicide», you can't log out. You will just be revived in one hour at the place you died. Of course, if in the real world someone removed the Neuro Linker from your neck, that's a different story... right now, at Haru's home..."

There isn't anyone. His mother is on a trip and will return tomorrow, and then three years would have passed in this world.

Niko who glanced around, again quickly whispered.

"The closest Leap Point from here is either Ikebukuro station or Sunshine City. We cannot quickly reach either. Even if we aim for those, to break through the encirclement we have to fight at least once no matter what..."

There she momentarily stopped, and Niko's ruby like eyes shone a sharp light.

"But, that Radio bastard also miscalculated."

"Mis, miscalculate?"

"That's right. That number of people, is for me... that is a number gathered to kill one King. However, right here, is not just one."

There Haruyuki opened his eyes wide.

For the color circle that determine duel avatar's affinity, Yellow is a color best at «Indirect Attack». It specialized in various forms of unpleasant weak point attacks, but its direct attack power is less than other colors. On the other hand, the Red King Niko is a demon of long range firepower, and for Black King Kuroyukihime, he had only seen her fight a few times, but her form is built for close range attacks.

If those two cover each other, even if the enemy is a King and 30 people, there might be a chance to win.

Thinking till there, Haruyuki was filled with a small feeling of strangeness.

Why did Kuroyukihime keep silent all that time? If it was the normal her, at the moment when the Yellow King appeared, she should be going after him with more force than Niko?

Haruyuki who turned around to look at his right side behind, saw - .

With both sword hands dangling down, and slumped like she was in fear of something, that deep black avatar shape.

“Se...”

Before he involuntarily called ‘Senpai’, the Yellow King’s crisp voice again echoed loudly.

“Unless Cherry appears, we will have you take responsibility right, Red King? ...Since that is the case...”

The slowly lifted up left hand long and small finger, pointed straight at the black spot on the bottom of the crater.

“The now starting fun fun carnival, you will watch without interfering right, Black King?”

After being hit with the extremely self-righteous speech, Kuroyukihime remained head down without a single reaction. After over five seconds have passed, she finally lifted up her head, and pointed her right sword hand at the Yellow King.

“...Don’t mess with me, Radio.”

The speech that leaked out of the mask was in attack mode,

however the sound was not fierce like usual. To the opponent, or more like to herself, Kuroyukihime continued to spit out words.

“That formation, even you would not think it can stop two Kings. I... if you think I would just watch silently, that is a huge mistake.”

“Oh? Does that mean you will fight? You will turn that blood soaked blade on me as well? I went to the trouble of giving you a side seat to watch, do you actually want to make it difficult on yourself...?”

As Kuroyukihime pointed out, that was not an absolute advantageous situation, but the Yellow King still showed a ‘Kukuku’ laughter from deep in his throat.

“...To be honest, that you would come to the Unlimited Field today with Scarlet Rain, even I did not expect that. But... this level of irregularity will not stop my legion «Crypt Cosmic Circus»’s fun carnival. I have waited a long, long time for the day to meet you like this, Lotus. To give you this small present that had been sitting in my pocket for a long time!”

With a showy gesture the Yellow King extended his fingers, and Haruyuki saw something rectangular that flashed. About the same size as a playing card, but he could not see the design.

The clown avatar skillfully spun the card on his finger, then snapped it.

From the sunlight shining down between the clouds, that card danced in the air with a sparkle for tens of meters, then stuck into the ground silently a little away from Haruyuki’s group.

He did not think it was an attack object. As Haruyuki looked on while dumbfounded, from the surface of the card, a sideways triangle, floated up, and lightly lit up. At that moment, Niko beside him lightly whispered.

“It’s a Replay File.”

Right after, the card’s surface shone brightly, and an inverted cone shape light was released directly above it.

Many noise like lines appeared in the air, and was soon turned into a picture. The half transparent 3D image, was a duel avatar that he had not seen before.

Red. The form was orthodox humanoid, well balanced armor on different parts, shone a pure red that could not be more than that. Different from Scarlet Rain's many colored flame red - to say it in words, it's color of passion.

Again, Niko's raspy voice leaked out.

“Previous generation... «Red Rider».”

Kuroyukihime backed off a step, and said in a moan.

“Stop... stop it!”

It was at that time that the 3D image suddenly started to move.

The pure red avatar appearing large in the air, leaned forward with its right hand held in a fist, and left hand spread open to the side. In Haruyuki's ears, a pleasant sounding crisp boy's voice loudly flowed.

“This... this worthless goal, had we been fighting till now for it!? Hating each other, fighting each other, killing each other... to see that ending, for years, for thousands of «duels» again and again!? No, even if that is Brain Burst developer's written scenario... we are not NPC controlled by game masters! This game's main character, is us! Isn't that right, Lotus!”

The scene was pulled back, at the time the red avatar became smaller, another avatar sitting directly in front was framed in. A deep black avatar with four long large blades, it was Black Lotus.

To the head lowered Black King, the first generation Red King continued to gesture wildly and speak fiercely.

“We did control our legions and continued to fight till now. But that, is not because we are enemies! It's because we are rivals right!? I... like your style of fighting, Lotus. If someday we meet in the real world, I want to become your friend. Absolutely will. No, I want to! That is why I don't want to fight you with sudden death! You are probably the same!”

At that moment, a little bit sharp girl's voice echoed.

“Wait Rider, I can't just ignore what I heard!”

Then the red avatar turned left as if in a panic, and raised one hand.

“N, no, that’s not it. I don’t mean it like that... now I am done for.”

On top of that voice, were many sounds of laughter.

Black Lotus who was head down in the scene, suddenly relaxed her shoulders. She raised her head, and with calm voice - .

“Yea... That’s right. It’s like you said, Rider. I like you too. Of course, in a respect kind of way.”

She quickly stood up, moved forward one step, and the Black King extended her right sword hand towards the Red King.

“I thought you would understand, Lotus!”

After shouting that joyfully, the Red King was about to extend his right hand to shake hands, but stopped while a bit lost. Then the Black King shrugged her shoulder, and said with a bit of laughter.

“Oops, sorry about this. Then... let’s do this.”

After saying that, she stepped close to the Red King, and made a gesture to hug around his neck. The Red King, after scratching his face like he was embarrassed, put his hands around Black Lotus’ waist. Again from outside the scene, the girl earlier shouted.

“Wait wait!”

“Don’t be mad, it’s in exchange of handshakes only.”

The Red King said in an anxious voice for excuse, and again multiple laughter echoed -

At that moment.

Inside Black Lotus’ deep black goggle, two eyes lit up with ice like blue white light.

Her two sword hands crossed behind the Red King’s neck gave off a strong violet shine.

“«Death By Embracing».”

A special attack skill was quietly voiced, the two crossed swords, moved in a cutting way just like a huge scissor.

Red Rider’s body completely lost strength, and collapsed down near

Black Lotus' feet like a broken doll. However just his head, remained on the Black King's crossed arms.

From the cut on the head, large amount of bright red sparks dripped down, and Black Lotus turned her face away.

The high density silence, was broken apart by a high pitched scream.

“N... nooooooo!!”

The replay ended there, the shape of Black Lotus who stood there while holding her rival's head, was melting away and erased by noise lines again.

However the small scream did not stop and continued to ring in Haruyuki's ears. That, was from the throat of Kuroyukihime who stood right beside him, he finally realized.

“Stop... stop, stop it...!”

“Se... sen, pa...”

Haruyuki who called out on reaction, noticed that his voice was violently shaking and stopped his breath. Kuroyukihime looked slightly at Haruyuki, and soon turned her face away, shaking her head left and right many times.

“Haruyuki-kun... I am... I, am...”

What was ahead did not become words.

Suddenly, the two eyes in Kuroyukihime's face plate goggle that was shining blue violet light, with a small line of light going left and right, then abruptly disappeared. At the same time, like a robot with its power cut, all the strength went out of the deep black avatar body - .

With a dry sound, the Black King's body fell down to the blue black crater bottom.

“Senpai... senpai?”

Not understanding what's going on, Haruyuki called with his shaky voice as he knelt down and shook the delicate avatar. However Kuroyukihime did not show any kind of reaction at all.

“...«Zero File»...! Lotus, you... that much...”

Behind him, Niko whispered quietly.

Not understanding what she meant, Haruyuki was going to turn around, but went still on hearing the loud laughter from up high.

“Kukuku... Fufufu, Kufufuhahahahahaha!!”

The owner of the roaring laughter, was the Yellow King, Yellow Radio looking down from high above.

“Kufufufufu... as I thought. You are still tied to that betrayal. You going with expectation to become Zero state is on the other hand disappointing... you should have quietly stayed hidden in a small cellar, with that level of resolution, I am surprised you said that big talk about aiming for level 10, Black Lotus!”

“Y... you bastard...”

That murmur leaked out of Haruyuki’s throat with a rasp.

Right after, changing to a whip like sharp sound, the Yellow King’s voice echoed throughout the crater.

“Well then, my carnival’s final program, let us enjoy it! - Ready attacks! Target, Scarlet Rain! The small fries who try to interfere, crush them ruthlessly!!”

“Shit.”

With that poisonous word, Niko’s delicate avatar spread both arms wide.

“Come, Enhanced Arm...”

However, Takumu’s quickly extended hand held Niko’s shoulder.

“You can’t, Red King! If you expand your armament, then you will lose mobility and won’t be able to escape! It’s not possible to go against that number of people even with a King, forget Chrome Disaster’s subjugation for now, break through the encirclement from behind and retreat to Sunshine City’s Leap Point is what we should do!”

The small slits lined up under the mask, this time those blue white shining eyes turned towards Haruyuki.

“Haru, I will leave master to you! I will become a wall, so no matter what you do, bring her to the City!”

“B, but... then, you will...”

“I am fine! Those bastards, if they bring down the Red King, they will definitely go after master! I will not allow that!”

To the dignified yet somehow forcing himself tense voice, Haruyuki could do nothing else but nod.

“I... I understand, leaving it to you!”

While shouting, Haruyuki held up Kuroyukihime’s lax body with his left arm.

Right after - .

“Attack, Start!!”

The Yellow King moved his highly raised right hand down all at once.

# Chapter 6

What came falling down at the beginning, was of course, a heavy rain of long range attacks.

Even in the «Yellow Legion», of course not all members are yellow type - that is made up of only indirect attack type Burst Linkers. The 30 or so enemies surrounding the crater, with at least 10 red type people, released beams and explosive ammo that could be appropriately called a concentrated bombardment.

Most of that firepower was directed at Niko, which, the Red King, when compared to fortress mode, dodged with far more agile back dashes. However, one blue beam, maybe they were wrongly targeted, aimed for Haruyuki while he was holding Kuroyukihime and was immobile.

“Kuu...”

He somehow managed to twist his body and avoid it, but his left shoulder was lightly scratched. ‘This can’t even be called damage’ - as he strongly said in his mind at that moment.

“...!!”

From the burning sensation and sharp pain on his shoulder, Haruyuki involuntarily leaned back.

For Brain Burst «duels», at the same time the damage is dealt, a painful stimulus is given at a level unlike other Neuro Linker applications. However, the pain Haruyuki was feeling right now, is double the intensity of normal duels.

That means, it could only be like this in the Unlimited Neutral Field. In order to balance against the benefit to gain points without the risks of dueling, the special rules of «Unlimited time» and «Cannot leave instantly» existed in addition to having damage pain sensation doubled.

To Haruyuki who momentarily stood up, over his head, in just short moment, many small missiles would arrive.

“Oooo!”

It was Takumu who roared. He stood in front of Haruyuki and Kuroyukihime, Cyan Pile's right hand's pile driving equipment was aimed at the missile group.

‘Click!’ With that metallic sound a sharp steel pile was fired out, and from the blast wave, most of the enemy missiles exploded. However a few missiles remained, and hit the blue armored body here and there. Flashes. Explosion sounds.

“Guaaa...!”

Even though moaning and staggering, Takumu did not fall down. He turned his smoking huge body and shouted shortly.

“Haru, run!”

“Un... understood!”

‘Sorry’, while he apologized to his best friend in his mind, Haruyuki started running while dragging Kuroyukihime’s avatar. Where he was running to, was to Niko who had pulled her gun from her waist, and started firing at the enemy formation on the east side of the crater.

If they don’t get out of this encirclement first, then they cannot retreat nor counter attack. Fortunately, since the enemy completely surrounded the 100 meters or so diameter crater, the wall itself is thin. If they break through the enclosure with a charge attack, and make it out to the Green highway, then Sunshine City with the Leap Point would be just ahead.

While Haruyuki held Kuroyukihime with his right arm, he opened the wings on his back. After he was hit by the earlier attack, his special skill gauge recovered a little bit. It is possible to slide dash just to the edge of the crater.

With Niko’s continuous fire, there was one point of opening in the east enclosure. Staring at that, Haruyuki used all his strength to kick off the ground.

At that time, behind him the Yellow King, Yellow Radio’s crisp yet somehow squeaky voice loudly echoed.

“...«Silly Go Round»!!”

Special attack skill!

‘But it’s too late! The crater’s edge is right in front - ‘

“...Uwaaa!?”

The phenomenon that abruptly occurred made Haruyuki stood still.

The world began turning. No, to be precise, with the crater’s edge as a dividing line, the inside and outside rotated in different directions. The buildings in the background, and the enemy duel avatars standing there, all flowed in high speeds from left to right.

Furthermore, without knowing when it started, from the area around him many hazy yellow toy horses appeared and started to move up and down in an easy going way. Also, in his ears, a cheerful country style - however somehow the notes were a bit off kind of BGM could be heard.

Losing more and more of his sense of balance, Haruyuki knelt down on one knee there. Looking around, Niko who was right in front of him, and Takumu beside him were also trying their best to stand firm, with their bodies swaying.

“The fi... field is, turning...?”

To Haruyuki who said that while dumbfounded, the Red King’s sharp voice came flying.

“It’s just you seeing it turning! Nothing is actually moving! Close your eyes and run!”

“But... where to!?”

Actually, he could no longer tell which direction was the east side he was aiming for. If he went forward blindly and ended up going farther from the Leap Point, then there will be no turning back.

“That way!”

“This way!”

At the same time, Niko and Takumu pointed in the opposite directions.

At that moment, as if the enemy was aiming for the resulting immobility - .

From outside the crater, an angry swarm of firing lines came

attacking.

'We cannot avoid this', was Haruyuki's direct feeling as he looked up at the many incoming firepower lines. Those strong curvature of the paths, were just from looking. From the Yellow King, Yellow Radio's illusion attack, they just seem to be curved.

While thinking of at least protecting Kuroyukihime, Haruyuki was going to cover the small avatar with his expanded wings.

However faster than that, Takumu shouted once.

"Get down!!"

And then, his two strong arms held all three, and covered them while falling down.

"Ta..."

Opening his eyes wide, the words coming from Haruyuki's mouth were erased by tremendous explosion sounds. His view was coated white, and his cheeks were seared by the heat - right next to his ears, his best friend's suppressed screams sounded.

"Guuuuuu!!"

Right now, on Takumu's wide back, many different kinds of long range attacks are raining down. Just one hit's scratch gave him that much pain. What would be the total amount of pain sensation forced on Takumu's nerves? If it's like this, then wouldn't this be above the pain level Haruyuki felt in his self made training room - .

"Stop... Taku, stop already!"

Haruyuki shouted, as he tried to get out from under Takumu.

However steel like arms with strength held Haruyuki still, and at the same time a heavy breathing voice was released right next to him.

"It's... okay, Haru. To you... what I owed, just this, kind of thing... can't pay it back..."

"Nothing... there isn't anything! How many times do I have to say it for you to understand, Taku!"

His shout was desperate, but the reply to that was more anguish.

While shaken by direct hits, moaning sounds leaked from cracks in Cyan Pile's mask.

Mixed in the numerous range attack sounds, the Yellow King's detestable voice reached them.

“Unsightly... Burn that wooden puppet up.”

Many firing sounds responded to that, however Takumu did not fall.

Probably, the red type Burst Linkers in the enemy group, were people with not too high levels. Against those, Cyan Pile is not just level 4, but a blue type, furthermore with stamina as the main focus. That meant, he can take that all that concentrated fire without falling and continue to resist. But that also means the painful torment Takumu was experiencing would last longer.

Haruyuki could no longer say anything. Takumu was determined to protect the three of them until the Yellow King's special attack, «Silly Go Round»'s effect time ends.

Maybe she also realized that, Niko who is next to Haruyuki said shortly.

“...I take back what I said about you using your brain only, Cyan Pile. Just 30 seconds more.”

“Under... stood, I...”

‘Gasuu’.

That unpleasant sound echoed at close range, and Takumu's sound scrapped off.

Haruyuki saw three shining sharp pieces of metal slightly sticking out of the thick chest covering him, and looked at them while dumbfounded.

Some unknown time ago, long range attacks from the surrounding area has stopped. As the Go Round's cheerful strange BGM flowed, Cyan Pile's huge body was lifted up not by his own movement.

Standing right behind him, was a similar sized blue green duel avatar. With a rough form that made you think of heavy civil engineering equipment, a remarkably huge right arm was lifted up.

The end of that arm became three atrocious claws, and those were buried deeply in Cyan Pile's chest from behind.

That was one person in the waiting close combat type, he must have jumped out in frustration. While the goggle on his head that is like a previous era CRT monitor shone, the avatar let out a loud sound.

"I heard you were pretty good in the young «Blue». You are just proud of being a hard wall, Cyan Pile."

Lifting the skewered Takumu up, the heavy equipment type avatar lowly sneered.

"Heehe, before you die, remember this. The one who defeated you is, Sakkusu..."

"Your stupid name... I have no interest in it."

Takumu who murmured that with raspy sound, suddenly lifted up his right arm, and stuck the pile driver's firing hole at the center of his own chest.

"«Lightning Cyan Spike»!!"

With a weak yet firm shout, blue white flash is sent from the back end of the hole.

At the same time, the lightning that was shot out, passed from Cyan Pile's chest, to the heavy equipment type avatar's right arm, and then extended in a line to the square head and shot through. With 'crackle' sounds, Sakkusu something's right arm and goggle was blown apart, both of them floated in the air for an instant, then fell with an explosion.

With the Go Round illusion in effect, even if the enemy close in there was no way to aim accurately. However, that is a different story if the enemy's arm is holding you up. Following that arm in a line, the enemy's body is always there.

"Ta... Taku!!"

Haruyuki shouted.

'Incredible, after all you are incredible. You are far stronger and smarter than me - a best friend to be proud of.'

That feeling rose in his chest, but he did not have a chance to put

them into words.

“U... gyaaaaaa!!”

To the screaming enemy avatar who fell to the ground while holding his face with left hand, Takumu used his last strength to hold him still.

From under the mask that glanced at Haruyuki, a fading sound leaked out.

“After... I will leave it to you, Haru.”

Then both of his arms firmly held down the enemy - .

“«Splash Stinger»!!”

Between the two that is close together, machine gun like continuous fire sounds and flashes continued to appear.

The enemy's jerking movements stopped, and many cracks of light ran on both avatars.

An instant after, two different blue pillars towered up from the crater bottom. As polygon fragments dispersed from the explosion, Takumu and the enemy's shapes were no longer there.

At almost the same time, the Go Round illusion attack ended, and the world returned to the original state.

A moment of silence filled the crater that was south Ikebukuro park.

The long ranged attacks from the surrounding have already stopped, and only distant sounds of thunder and wind echoed.

For duel avatars' long range attacks, beam types overheat, and actual ammo will run out, so continuous firing forever was not possible. However even taking that into consideration, this silence is strange. They were probably taken in as well. By Cyan Pile and the other person's over dreadful display of their attacks on each other.

‘This is our chance to escape’, Haruyuki thought. It’s the time that Takumu bought with his life. However, somehow his feet could not move. While he was on one knee, Haruyuki’s small avatar shook.

A feeling that he could not explain himself, roared in his chest.

The feeling of helplessness as he could only be protected by his best friend. Anger at the Yellow King for setting his despicable trap and playing with others' hearts. And above all else - the feeling toward the person he held in his right arm, the deep black avatar that drooped without any strength as if power was cut - .

“...Senpai... senpai.”

From the bottom of Haruyuki's throat, a squeaky sound was wrung out.

“Kuroyukihime senpai... why... why are you not standing up...”

“It's useless, Silver Crow.”

It was Niko who murmured that.

With a strong ‘Crunch’ footstep echo, the Red King stood her delicate body up straight.

“«Zero File»... Right now, the power signal from that girl's soul that is sent to the avatar is zero. A Burst Linker with no fighting spirit cannot move a duel avatar. The reason is that a duel avatar's source of power is the heat from its owner's heart. If you don't even have the strength to face your wounds, you cannot even stand up. That is the «Brain Burst» game. That girl, too, understood even if she does not want to. But it's a problem that you cannot do anything about even if you understand it.”

After saying that in a low voice, Niko took a quick glance at Haruyuki.

“...Sorry, even though Cyan Pile sacrificed himself to buy time for us... I am not running away. I do not have the discipline to just quietly escape here. You are fine, just take that girl and retreat from here.”

Haruyuki thought he saw that the crimson girl avatar starting to burst into flames.

No, it was not an illusion. The area around her foot that took a step forward, he actually saw slight flames flare up.

‘It's reckless. The enemy formation is almost totally unscratched. There would be no way to win.’

While he thought that escaping is a sensible choice, Haruyuki did not move. If he left Niko here and ran away, then to himself, and also to Kuroyukihime, he realized that he would definitely lose something, so he just crouched there and replied in a low voice.

“I am not running away... I don’t want to run away and leave a comrade behind!”

“Comrade... - A hardcore fool. Then, do as you like.”

After a short break of speechlessness, Niko said that while dumbfounded, then took another step forward.

Extending her right hand straight out, she pointed her finger at the Yellow King standing on the crater’s west edge, then the Red King shouted.

“Yellow Radio! Before your cool appearance, your sneaky filled special attack gauge should now be empty! This time is my turn to pay you back... don’t forget, if you are defeated by me, you will at that time be forever retired!!”

As if being pushed back by the pressure, the Yellow King’s clown type avatar backed off half a step.

On the other hand, Niko took another step forward, and extended both arms wide.

“Come... Enhanced Armament - !!”

With a ‘Gou’ sound, flames flared up, and the avatar covered in that lightly floated up.

From the surrounding space, armament made up of flames appeared one after another, and containers covered the girl from all sides. Missile pods on both shoulders, thick armor skirt, thruster on the back - also in place of both arms, fearsome long and large main cannons.

Then Red King Scarlet Rain who became the shape of her other name «Immobile Fortress», landed on the center of the crater with a heavy tremor, and put out white steam all over her body.

From the 30 avatars surrounding them, Haruyuki felt that they momentarily wavered. Since the Yellow Legion’s territory is on the east side of Tokyo, they did not have many chances to be in contact

with the Red Legion controlling the west side in Nerima and Nakano. Not having a chance to battle Niko directly is a matter of course, and there should not even be many that had seen her fight from the gallery. Looking at Scarlet Rain's true shape, the first thing that happened was to be scared out of their wits from the huge size that could not be a duel avatar. The same as Haruyuki the other day.

As Haruyuki swallowed his saliva, in his ears came Niko's low voice with strong effect added.

"Hey, Silver Crow. Sorry to ask, but take care of just the close combat opponents that stick to my behind."

"Un... understood. But... senpai is..."

"They won't lay a hand on that girl, before they defeat me, that is. If I am taken down, then it does not matter, just fly away together with Lotus."

"..."

«Taken down» - in this situation, it would mean that Niko's Brain Burst would be forcefully uninstalled.

Before Haruyuki could reply with something, the Yellow King looking down from high above shouted with his usual poisonous voice.

"There is no need to fear! That thing is just a stationary turret, if you close in it's just a lump of steel!"

Then he held up his right hand.

"Close combat team, it is your turn! Long range team, support them! - Go!!"

With yellow light reflecting, at the same time as that arm going down - .

With 'Uoooo' battle roar echoing, from the crater's edge around 15 duel avatars all started charging in.

As if in response to that cry, the missile containers on both of Niko's shoulders opened with a crisp metallic sound. The few tens of seeker heads exposed shone red, and right after, they were fired

with white smoke trailing them.

The missile groups that were fired straight up, did a half circle curve and fell down aiming for the enemy duel avatars on the ground. Some dashed while pulling missiles, others took defensive stances, and the charge slackened.

Two of the standing ones, were instantly aimed at by the main cannons from both arms.

With ‘Kuooon’ high pitch resonance sounds, the released ruby heat rays swallowed the unfortunate two duel avatars. Instantly, ball shaped energy lumps that grew created tremendous explosions here and there.

They next became tall fire pillars with the same color as their avatar's armor. Their HP gauges were blown apart and disappeared.

‘- In one hit!’

Haruyuki was terrified. At the same time, ‘If it is like this then maybe’, he thought.

However, immediately from the outside edge, long range attack avatars who had finished recharging began firing. There would be no way that they could miss Scarlet Rain’s avatar that’s so huge that it cannot move, so they were sucked by the crimson fortress.

Her whole body was covered by flowers of explosions, but the Red King did not seem to tremor. In response, she aimed her four machine guns towards the outside and showered them.

Against long range attacks, they can do nothing but withstand them right now. Haruyuki grounded his inner molars strongly, and placed Kuroyukihime’s avatar there.

According to Niko, when you lost to the wound in your heart, then the Burst Linker will no longer move.

Haruyuki himself also experienced that.

Three months ago, when he knew of the existence of «Accelerate» for just a bit, to protect Kuroyukihime, he fought his best friend Takumu - Cyan Pile. Then he was beaten up to smithereens, and while overwhelmed by feelings of being small and powerless, he could no longer stand up beside the unconscious Kuroyukihime’s

avatar.

If at that time, Kuroyukihime's voice - illusion sound or they actually communicated - did not reach him, then Haruyuki probably could not fight any longer. Then he would not have awoken Silver Crow's hidden potential «Flight Ability» and would probably have lost everything.

That's why right now, seeing Kuroyukihime being unable to move, Haruyuki felt neither disappointment nor anger.

But he was sad.

He did not understand the reason why, but he was very sad.

Haruyuki blinked his eyes hard, removed his hand from the deep black avatar and stood up, then turned around and ran straight forward.

What he was aiming for, was the shape of a close combat avatar closing in behind Niko. His color was olive green, with oversized long and fat arms becoming U-shaped metal at the tip.

The opponent saw Haruyuki coming in from the front of his path, and yelled in a deep voice.

“Out of the way, small fry!”

Then he aimed the left U-shaped hand at Haruyuki, and continued with a shout.

“«Magnetron Weeeeeb»!”

At the same time as the skill name was being shouted, purple lightning was sent out, and it caught Haruyuki. However it did not do damage, in exchange it pulled Silver Crow's small avatar with tremendous power, and stuck him to the U-shape with a clank.

“Hiiiii, metal color is easy to suck in!”

As the olive colored guy shouted, he used his right hand to excessively beat Haruyuki. While Haruyuki used both arms to guard against that, he thought calmly.

From the name, this is the enemy's special attack using magnetic attraction. Then it should have a time limit. Furthermore, since it is a skill that can completely hold an opponent, then at most 10

seconds.

Haruyuki suddenly extended both hands, and covered the opponent's goggle shaped eyes. Then he expanded his wings, and left the ground all at once.

“Hey, you, let go of your hands.”

With the screaming opponent, while they were stuck together like a magnet, Haruyuki went up some tens of meters high into the air.

Right after, the purple waves generating the magnetism disappeared, and the opponent shoved Haruyuki away with his freed left hand.

“Just covering my eyes, doing that won't have any damage on... hey whatt!?”

Haruyuki ignored the screaming opponent that found out he was left in the sky with nothing to hold onto, and started a full speed descent. He passed the magnetic avatar in the air, and extended his right foot, moving forward with a sharp cone.

“...Uoo!”

At the same time as he psyched up, he pierced through the back of the drill equipped avatar that was about to jump onto Niko. To the enemy who was nailed to the ground with a loud impact, Haruyuki hit using his left hand the area at the back of the neck.

“Aaa... Gaaa... Aaa!”

After breaking two spinal bones, Haruyuki jumped back from the screaming enemy, and a little in front of him the magnetic avatar fell down from the air. With full body landing shock, this one too could no longer move.

As Haruyuki was jumping out to finish that guy off, his right cheek was suddenly forcefully hit.

He was blown away in a flashy way, and tumbled around. Sharp pain from his broken inner teeth made him see sparks in front of his eyes.

Haruyuki forcefully ignored that and jumped up, seeing the 3rd enemy closing in. A four corner body as if carved from stone, and

covered by a light blue martial arts robe. The mask reminiscent of a Moai[9] statue was humorous, but he knew the power of those rock like fists from one hit. A very close contact type with no weapon, but these orthodox types are very fearsome.

Maybe a veteran, the martial artist not only silently attacked, he slid up into range and suddenly released a right front kick.

Silver Crow is fortunate to have a very thin body, he somehow managed to avoid a direct hit, and the left flank that was scratched gave out sparks and his HP bar was cut. He used a left punch for counter attack, but that was stopped by a huge wooden like right arm.

‘- When you get into a situation of close combat with a blunt type that is disadvantageous to metal color...’

Suddenly, an old lecture from Kuroyukihime was awakened in his brain.

‘- Don’t guard or counter attack in panic, try to flow with the enemy’s attack and use its power. It is possible with your reaction speed. Listen, no matter how powerful a punch is, it’s slow compared to a bullet, don’t forget.’

“Zeryaa!!”

The martial artist avatar released a right front straight punch with a large psyche.

The fist came flying in with a blue aura, as Haruyuki pushed down his fear and watched. ‘While falling back behind, left hand under the enemy fist, and right feet against the enemy’s stomach.’

“...Raaa!!”

At the same time as his shout, he flapped the wings on his back for just an instant with all his strength. With the lift generated, Haruyuki kicked his right foot up, and then with his own punching power as a catapult, the brusque martial artist danced up into the sky.

“Niko, above!”

Hearing Haruyuki’s yell or not, Scarlet Rain’s shoulder missiles fired, and all of them hit the martial artist in the sky. Swallowed by

many red black explosions, that avatar fell to the ground trailing smoke, and right after, a light blue pillar of light went up and disappeared.

“...Hmm, not bad for so being so delicately built, Silver Crow.”

“Why thank you!”

After shouting a reply to Niko’s bad mouthing, even thought it distract him from countering the next enemy, from the side of his eyes, Haruyuki looked at the deep black avatar laying a bit away.

‘- That person, Kuroyukihime, is definitely not a super woman that’s totally perfect. A middle school student like me, and a girl that is easily hurt.’

That thought, when he saw Kuroyukihime crying from words not from his heart, he definitely could not forget. However even with that, the admiration and worship inside him did not reduce even a bit.

Not against strength.

It’s the will to become strong. The soul that continues to shine while resisting different adversity, Haruyuki is absolutely drawn to it.

‘- That is why, you should be standing up again. I don’t know what kind of relationship you had with the previous Red King, but you should get past that memory, and should be standing. Isn’t that right!?’

At the same time as Haruyuki’s desperate silent shout under his silver mask.

The momentarily slowed enemy legion attack restarted fiercely.

The remaining close combat types were less than ten, but they started advancing from all directions. To support them, long range fire came down like rain.

“Don’t underestimate meeee!”

Niko roared, left and right main cannons, missile pods, and machine guns started firing.

Then all of them spit out fire - right before that, Haruyuki thought

he heard a strange sound.

A high frequency sound that could only be called noise shook the air. At the same time, his view of the world doubled, and tripled.

The missiles released by Scarlet Rain suddenly spun in the sky, and flew in different directions. Even the main cannon beams aiming for the long range attackers outside missed them from above, and hit a far away building, with explosion sounds echoing.

“Shit... it’s jamming!”

Niko shouted in a low voice.

“It’s not that Radio guy... one of his yellow color underlings! Find him!”

“Un... understood!”

At the same time as his answer, Haruyuki expanded his wings and strongly kicked the ground to fly up. However.

From the ground two wires extended up like snakes and wrapped around Haruyuki’s feet.

He was pulled back all at once, and hit the ground hard. Even out of breath from the shock, Haruyuki tried to cut the wires with his knife. But.

“«Electric Therapy»!!”

“...!!”

With someone’s shout of a skill name, blue white lightning ran along all of Haruyuki’s body, and at the same time he was assaulted by intense shock. Looking around, he saw a mechanical avatar with wires extending from both arms, and on his back was a transformer like equipment emitting sparks.

It seems like the main attack was to stun, so he was not damaged much at all, but with his body not under his control, Haruyuki could not shake loose the wires around his feet.

“Gu... u...!”

Haruyuki groaned, and he was showered by the electric avatar’s high pitched laughter.

“Kiiiiiiiiii! Just sleep there for a while, brat! Till the Red King’s whole body is stripped apart!!”

Like those words said, he could see many shapes of close combat avatars rushing towards Niko’s fortress type avatar. They close in from her main cannons’ blind spots and started to shower her enhanced armament connection points with punches and kicks. Orange sparks flew, bolts were knocked apart, and the thick armor was stripped off one by one.

Haruyuki desperately resisted the electricity paralyzing his whole body and turned his body around, trying to crawl towards the electric avatar.

However the sparks did not seem to weaken even a bit, and he could not even change his head’s direction.

‘- What should I do. What should I do. What should I do at this time, senpai.’

‘- Hurry... if I don’t hurry, then Niko!’

Sounds of despair appeared in his head, at that time from the far edge of the crater, he heard rich tone laughter loudly echo.

“...Hahaha! Hahahahahaha!!”

It was the Yellow King, Yellow Radio. His slender and long body with the two horn hat swaying, showing joy with pantomime actions.

“How! How unsightly! Comical shapes! A King’s dignity and such... there isn’t a single fragment of that!? After all, you two don’t have the qualifications to be a King, that is what it means! The Red is an upstart fake! And the Black, is a despicable traitor right!?”

The relentless insults, was overlap by ‘Gishi gishi’ metallic breaking sounds. And then, a girl’s small painful sounds too.

“A... a...”

He looked that way, and saw a large close combat type avatar standing on Scarlet Rain’s missile container, holding her left main cannon.

He used his whole body to pull the huge cannon up. From the joints

a lot of flame like sparks came out, that looked almost like fresh blood.

Eventually, with a ‘Bikin’ sudden sharp breaking sound, the main cannon was pulled off.

Linked to that, without a doubt, was Niko’s broken left arm that came dangling down. With Niko’s unsuppressed scream that leaked out, the enemy avatar lifted the cannon up high in a victory pose and roared at the same time.

“All right! The Red King is just like this! You guys, strip off all her skin and yank that kid out!! Till right before her gauge run out, give her plenty of humiliation!!”

Haruyuki grounded his inner teeth till they almost broke, and his extended fingers of his right hand desperately clawed the ground.

In front of that, was a dust covered black lotus avatar laying flat there with eyes fully lost all light.

“Senpai... senpai.”

Haruyuki pushed out a raspy sound from his throat paralyzed by the stun effect.

Behind him, maybe Niko’s last resistance, her remaining weapons continued to sound as they fired. While feeling the vibration from empty explosions, Haruyuki still shouted.

“You... you are okay with this? This way of finishing, is your game ending?”

In his brain, from last night, the real Kuroyukihime and Niko sleeping while holding each other appeared lightly.

What that scene represent, and what the two girls truly wish for, Haruyuki could not conjecture. But, the one thing he was sure is, soon everything will end. The slight bond born out of chance in one night, will be cruelly broken apart.

“Senpai... Black King!!”

Haruyuki used the rest of his strength and screamed.

Right now, the wound Kuroyukihime faced in her heart, might be so huge size that Haruyuki could not fathom. The first generation Red

King - a comrade, and friend, while he was excited, he was betrayed and forever retired from the accelerated world, Kuroyukihime must have continued to suffer a long time for that action.

No, maybe «Red Rider» and her, were more than just comrade or friends. That kind of opponent, that person was put down by her hand.

But.

Even if that was true.

“What is «Acceleration» to you!? And «Brain Burst»!!”

Hitting the ground with his fist surrounded by sparks, Haruyuki roared with passion.

“Getting to level 10 that has never been achieved before... Is your ambition to see what's ahead in this world just to this degree? Is it so cheap as to exchange for the memory of just one man! Someone who wants to exceed the human husk... being tired down by past regrets, how long are you planning to be this unsightly! You don't have the free time to do that, you should cut through all kind of obstacles, mow them down, and charge forward as the last person, isn't that right, Black Lotus!!”

‘Rin’.

In front of his thrown out right hand, was it an illusion that he saw the deep black sharp part waver?

No, that's wrong. Inside the sharp form's goggles, like distant stars, slight violet lights shone. Weak like glowing embers of soul, beat with ‘thump thump’.

“Sen... pa...”

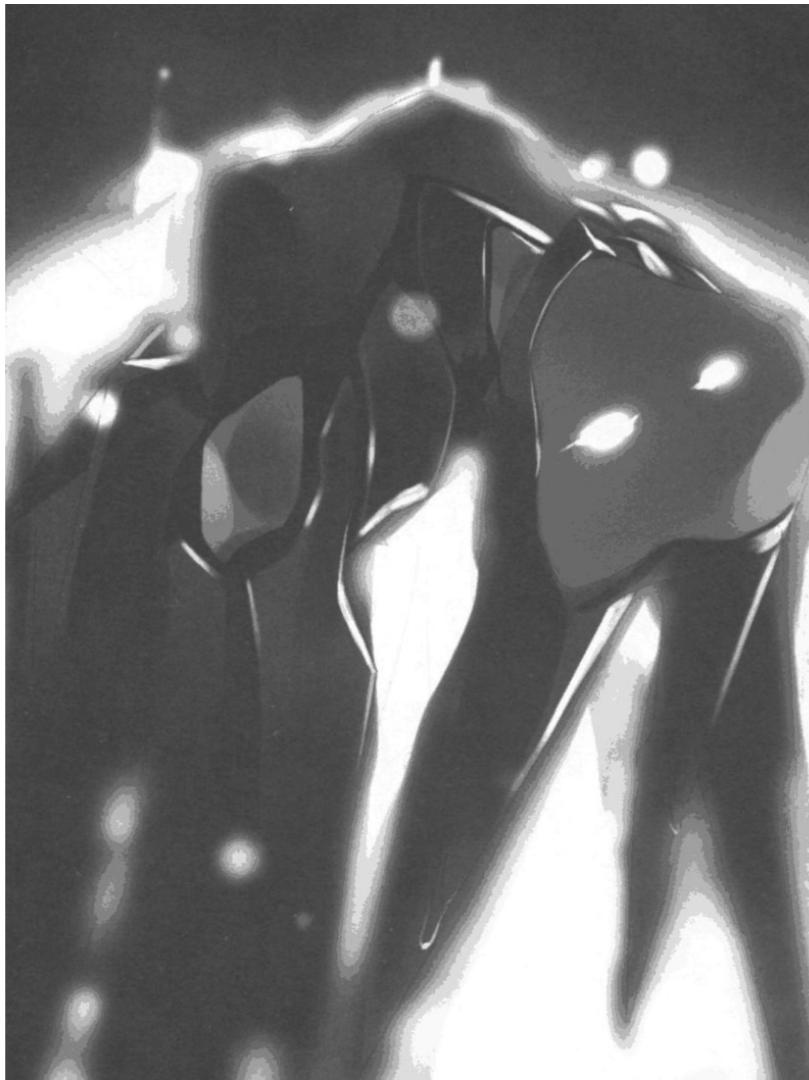
Haruyuki quietly said.

‘Bun!’ kind of strong vibration sound overlapped that.

That, was under the goggles, the sound of two eyes strongly shining.

In the half transparent armor as if made from obsidian, from

parting lines starting from the head to the limbs, the same light filled them up. That blew away all the dust covering her whole body, reviving its dull reflection.



Finally, the sword arms and legs strongly vibrated.

To the lightly rising, as if pulled by invisible strings, deep black avatar, Haruyuki watched without blinking as his throat clogged up.

Black Lotus who stood straight up, with the tip of her feet slightly floating above ground, slowly began to hover and move. She reached Haruyuki who was lying flat while being caught by electric

shocks, and stopped still.

“Haruyuki-kun.”

The sound that echoed was kind and strict like usual.

“...Yes.”

Hearing his groaning reply, she murmured with her familiar wry smile mixed sound.

“That is... the way you said it earlier, it was like Rider and I were lovers.”

“Is... is that wrong?”

“Absolutely wrong. You are my first, I should have told you before. Also... how long are you planning to lie there, try sticking a hand into the ground.”

“Huh... o... okay.”

As told, Haruyuki lined up his sharp fingers, and stuck them into the dry ground near him.

At that moment, he felt that the sparks holding his whole body slowly flow into the ground, and Haruyuki shouted in realization.

“I... I see, earth...”

“If you think about the skill’s affinity and feature, you should be able to counter even if seen for first time. It seems I still have a lot of things to teach you.”

Right after, he heard a ‘Pusun’ kind of pathetic sound from behind, and Haruyuki turned his head to look.

He saw the electric avatar slowly backing off while white smoke came from the transformer on his back.

“You should be able to handle the rest yourself. - I have to go look after the little girl that fell into a trap.”

She said that casually.

With a ‘Bunn’ air vibration, the deep black avatar disappeared.

Without a single preparation, that was a fearsome speed dash. Kuroyukihime who went forward like a dark color beam for a few tens of meters, the next moment, she appeared beside the close combat type enemy standing directly on Niko.

“Uooo...”

After that surprised yell leaked out, the enemy avatar holding Red King's main cannon let it go, and opened both hands with strangely strong fingers trying to dance with Kuroyukihime. Having the arm strength to pull off Niko's main cannon, instead of a blunt attack type, it must be a hold skill type duel avatar.

Against that, not sure what she is thinking of, Kuroyukihime extended her right arm straight out as if saying ‘please grab it’. The enemy's eyes shone strongly, and his snake like extended hands held Black Lotus' arm in two places.

“Got you, «Oneway Sl...».”

With the shouting of the skill name, he turned around, putting the arm he was holding on his right shoulder, going into a judo throw posture - at that instant, some things dropped down.

Ten fat curved cylinders. Fingers. The enemy's fingers holding Kuroyukihime's sword arm, to throw her, he applied strength, and they were cut by the sharp edge.

“Sorry, hold type skills do not work on me.”

Kuroyukihime said that to the enemy frozen in the throw posture, and cut her carried right arm down in one go.

From right shoulder to left flank, the faint light passed through. Then the enemy avatar's tough upper body slid down, and the remaining 70% of the body fell to the ground.

“Aaa... ga... gaaaaa!!”

He seemed to still have HP remaining so did not disappear, however just disappearing might be better off for him. Screaming in the pain of his body being cut apart, his remaining arm flapped the ground. Kuroyukihime moved her eyes away to stare at the remaining 7 or 8 enemy close range type avatars.

“I am not sure if you all realized, but people fighting with me

always taste the pain of losing body parts.”

The tone was calm, but the savagery echoing in it made everyone in the battle field breathless.

“You can not... say that you don’t want to now!”

With that loud shout, the black raptor like avatar attacked an unlucky guy that she set her eyes on. High pitched metallic sounds, intermittent screams, and the surrounding Burst Linkers’ cries of desperation soon filled the air.

After determining that he could leave that place to her for a while, Haruyuki turned towards the electric avatar that still had the wires around him.

When their eyes met, the enemy turned his old fashioned instrument-like face away and raised a hand.

“Hey, wait a minute. I am recharging my battery right now...”

“Like I would wait!!”

Haruyuki shouted, and grabbed the two wires wrapped around his feet with both hands and released them, then kicked the ground all at once leaving it behind.

“U, uwawawa!”

With the moaning enemy dangling below, he attained altitude, then while hovering started turning in circles.

“Waa - Aaa - Aaa -”

With the high and low screams continuing from the opponent, Haruyuki attained plenty of centripetal force then let go of the wires, and the heavy looking robot avatar flew south with tremendous speed, then with a small falling sound somewhere in the group of buildings.

His own eyes were spinning as well, so he shook his head strongly to clear them and looked down, the expanding battle below was right in his sights.

That could no longer be called a «Duel», but a «Slaughter» probably.

Most of the blue type close combat avatars fight with their hand or

foot, and some with hammer or sword like contact weapons. That is for blue type comrades, they basically switch between attacker and guard, aiming for any opening in the opponent.

For Kuroyukihime - Black Lotus, with four sword limbs is a super close combat type as seen, but can take various attack actions.

Cut, a slash forward type of action is matter of course, if the opponent blocks with a fist or arm, they will be cut apart, and just chasing an opponent with a dash while swinging a leg up would cut the target apart. Absolutely no contact is allowed. Everything that touches her gets cut apart, just like a «Black death water lily» - .

The dance like battle shape was incredibly beautiful, and also full of very painful rejection.

Within merely a minute or two, the enemy close combat team was mostly annihilated, or with lost parts, damaged, in sharp pain, rolling on the ground out of action.

“Y... you bitch!!”

The last remaining large build Burst Linker suddenly roared loudly. He held up his thick long sword, and swung it down right at Kuroyukihime.

Spectacular speed and timing. The lightning like steel colored thick sword that came down, Kuroyukihime did not avoid it, but took it with two crossed sword arms.

‘Kiiiiin!’ That ear splitting high frequency wave echoed pass. Brilliant sparks came from the contact point, and the movement of both stopped.

‘Screech screech’ like high pitch metallic sound continued to echo. The silver and black swords, with every second ate into each other deeper.

Which will eat into the other first, Haruyuki could not instantly determine. However, the sword wielding fighter type avatar, his Hannya[10] like mask twisted in a sneer.

“Zann!”

At the same time as the fighter’s low sound, right below the sword, Kuroyukihime’s hands cut left and right in one instant.

What fell without a sound, were the fighter's head, and the huge sword's upper part. The head that rolled around with unbelieving eyes was pierced without mercy by Kuroyukihime's left foot tip. A light pillar went up, and the enemy avatar blew apart like glass figurine and disappeared.

Again, a few seconds of silence.

What broke it was a short sound released from the far edge of the crater.

“...Why.”

With a flat sound that finally lost composure maintained till now, the Yellow King, Yellow Radio said in a moan.

“Why appear now, to interrupt my years-long prepared circus carnival? After continuing to hide in a basement somewhere for two years, why?”

In the clown's laughing face, the up turned eyes were filled with white phosphorescent. The dead branch like arms spread wide left and right, standing swaying on one leg, and head swinging slowly left and right.

Suddenly under the mask, a ‘kukukukuku’ small laughter leaked out. His right hand pointing straight at Kuroyukihime, the Yellow King said in a voice with regained mockery.

“That means, you have already forgotten? From your betrayal, our friend that was beheaded? ...Right now he, what he is doing and where. Never to return to the accelerated world again... I wonder if you remember the person who created the reason why that is? If it was me, I won't be able to forget it. If it was a normal fight then fine, but that kind of sneak attack... right?”

‘Kuu, kuukuukuuku’.

While hearing the laughter coming up from that throat, Haruyuki shouted in his mind.

‘- Don't listen to it. That guy wants to take away your fighting spirit again.’

However, to say that in actual words, Haruyuki could not do it. For the Black King and the Yellow King, since the beginning of the

accelerated world they have been training together, between the two that had been friends till the incident two years ago. He thought there was a history that not just anyone can cut into.

Haruyuki slowly descended, and he landed behind Black Lotus who was standing beside the half broken Scarlet Rain. Inside his chest, he just strongly prayed that she would not lose.

Suddenly - .

Kuroyukihime lifted up her right arm without a sound. The obsidian edge that did not have a single scratch from the battle was pointed straight at the Yellow King.

The Black King started her smooth silky voice.

“...You are mistaken about just one thing, Yellow Radio.”

“Oh? What would that be? Don’t tell me that was not a cowardly sneak attack?”

“Not that. You think that your head has the same weight as Red Rider’s to me, that. Let me tell you another thing... I...”

With a ‘Riin’ sound, she slashed her right hand horizontally, and Kuroyukihime said.

“From the first time I met you, I disliked you a lot!”

The Yellow King’s upper body bended backwards.

Kuroyukihime glanced to the side then behind her and quickly called out.

“Rain, your remaining weapons finished recharging right!? Crow, protect her!! - Let’s go!!”

And then, carving a line in the bottom of the crater, she started a fierce dash.

“Damn... let me rest a bit more!”

It was Niko who cursed. With her remaining right cannon and half broken missile pods giving out grinding sounds, she pointed them towards the enemy long range group at the outer edge of the crater.

While Kuroyukihime and the Yellow King talked, Haruyuki was not

just idly listening. He used the seconds-long pause to find someone. The enemy indirect attack avatar that used jamming to mess up Niko's aim.

'- That guy!'

Haruyuki discovered a yellow type hiding behind a red type at the crater's north side, and shouted in his chest. The pods equipped on both shoulders were open, and from the center a parabolic antenna with the center cylinder giving out light effects stuck out.

After determining that avatar was in the middle of doing electronic wave attacks, Haruyuki fiercely kicked the ground.

However, there is a full 30 meters from the center of the crater to the outside edge. Even though Silver Crow is a speed type, he could not get there instantly, so the support red type had time to aim his huge weapon.

A slight chill ran down Haruyuki's back. Just like this, being aimed at in an open space by a gun with no place to hide - this is truly the situation and reason why he had so low success rate these past few weeks.

He could only dodge it.

If he does not defeat that jamming avatar, then Niko's firepower will remain sealed. If that is the case, then the enemy formation's existing red type avatar firepower will be concentrated on Kuroyukihime, to prevent her from directly fighting the Yellow King.

Whether Haruyuki can avoid this one shot will probably determine the trend of this battle.

The huge pressure made his hands and feet cold with paralysis. His view narrowed, and only the gun barrel opening darkness expanded wide. It's no good, if he is like this then he cannot avoid it. The bullet released by the still gun in the virtual training room, he could at most avoid 30% of them.

'- No. This current situation, is different from that white room.'

The reason is, that gun is held by an avatar. With a brown camouflage pattern body and large lens like eyes shining, that's a sniper type duel avatar. Not the gun, look at that guy. Try to see the

action of when he is about to pull the trigger.

Instantly, from Haruyuki's view, everything other than the enemy avatar disappeared. He forgot about the battlefield situation, opened both eyes, and just captured the shape of the enemy holding the rifle.

The back of the enemy's neck tensed, right shoulder lifted up a few millimeters, right hand shook -

'...There!'

- Right hand finger squeezed the trigger, and a blue white shone from the gun barrel.

At that time, he had already leaned left.

'Shaaa!' With that air vibration sound, a heat ray scratched by Haruyuki's right chest and right shoulder going behind him. He ignored the burning sensation and flew the last ten meters forward, passing right beside the enemy long range type to dance with the indirect type behind.

To the surprised electronic wave avatar, Haruyuki attacked both antennas with two hand knives. After seeing the delicate equipment smashed to bits, he sunk down for a moment, then flew straight up.

'- Niko!'

Whether his mental shout reached her or not, the instant the jamming was stopped, Scarlet Rain's remaining weapons all spewed fire.

Her right main cannon shot out a beam of heat, and left side missiles fell down, then there was a mysterious curtain of flame that went up on the crater's outer edge. Of course that one shot would not kill all of the enemy army, but all the long range shots that were firing at Black Lotus were silenced.

In the moment of silence after the explosions, Kuroyukihime's fierce roar echoed.

"Radio!!"

Her right arm blade drew a deep black path.

What was cut apart without a sound, and floated in the air, was

Yellow Radio's huge hat's right side horn.

"Lotus!!"

After the angry reply with not a single bit of banter up till now, the Yellow King took out a long and big baton like weapon from somewhere and started counter attacking. The hit that came in while drawing golden lines, Kuroyukihime used her left sword arm to parry, and the sparks that flew brightly lit up both of them.

Niko that was intermittently shooting restraining fire, Haruyuki landed on the long stabilizer extending from her back and watched the fierce battle starting on the western edge of the crater with half amazement.

Kings, that is, level 9 Burst Linkers fighting each other, of course it was his first time seeing it.

That, everyone in this place - including the two persons fighting - would probably say the same thing.

The current «Pure Color Seven Kings», aside from Niko, reached level 9 almost at the same time a bit more than two years ago. Then they found out about the cruel sudden death rule that is needed to reach level 10, and to avoid fights to the death, they started a round table conference.

In that conference, the Black King, Black Lotus sneak attacked the first generation Red King, Red Rider and killed him in one critical hit. A King killing another King, that time was the first and only one. After that, the Black King was hunted as a betrayer and she stayed hidden in Umesato middle school's local net for about two years, and the other Kings signed no invasion treaties with each other and did not leave their own territory.

That is why, for level 9s fighting each other normally, since the beginning of accelerated world, this is the first time.

Haruyuki, and Niko too.

And as for the remaining ten yellow legion members, they all stopped attacking, and watched the fight with breaths held.

'- Fast!'

Haruyuki leaked that sound of awe in his chest.

If he did not concentrate, then all he could see around the two fighting, were mysterious flashes that continued to bounce around. The Black King's four chain, and five chain continuous attacks, were impressively parried by the Yellow King's baton as he turned in high speed, while he looked for openings and used his long leg to kick. That was blocked by Kuroyukihime's leg, and ripple like impact waves spread out, distorting the background.

With the way to high power attacks continuing, radiating cracks started to appear from both fighter's feet, and pieces of rubble started flying about. The space was filled with colorless pressure, and the lights shining from both combatant's armor, also seem to increase in intensity.

“...It will be soon.”

Niko murmured, and Haruyuki asked in reaction.

“Wh, what?”

“Those two's special attack gauge should be full. The real battle will be starting.”

Before that sentence finished, ‘Baan!’ that one impact sound exploded, and pushed by that those two distanced themselves from each other.

They soon closed up, Kuroyukihime slowly lowered her waist, left arm held horizontal in front of her body, and right sword arm perpendicular to that peak. The long blades pulsed and started to be covered by violet light, and at the same time a low frequency vibration shook the air.

On the other hand, Yellow Radio crossed both arms in front of himself, with fingers holding the golden baton. The balls on the baton's either end, also released cyclic light.

The increasingly higher pressure, made Haruyuki feel a light snapping sensation around his cheek area.

A King's special attack, Haruyuki saw a fragment of its power in his duel with Niko. The huge beam released by one main cannon, blew away the top part of Shinjuku metropolitan government building far away in the battle field without much of effort.

If same level potential power as that attack, is released in such close

distance, what would happen? To Haruyuki who opened his eyes wide and forgot to breathe, Niko's voice again lightly reached his ears.

“...Not with power, it will be decided by speed.”

“Eh... wh, what do you mean?”

“No matter how you look at it, Lotus' special attack is direct contact type. Against that, Radio's special is illusion type. That means before Radio's skill going into effect, whether Lotus' one hit can reach him or not - will decide the battle.”

Haruyuki's throat made a 'Gokuri' sound.

The largely tilted sun, cut through the black clouds slightly, and one red beam of light came down.

That was reflected on the obsidian blade, at that instant.

Black Lotus' dignified sound echoed.

“«Death By Pi...».”

At the same time, Yellow Radio too.

“«Futile Fortune Wh...».”

However.

Two skill names that were shouted at the same time, neither finished the last sound.

‘Ton.’

That kind of small, however overwhelming presence dry sound echo, pressed down the two King's sounds.

That, was from Yellow Radio's bright yellow color breast armor, something piercing through from behind kind of sound.

Kuroyukihime who stopped her skill in mid shout, Haruyuki, Niko, the other Burst Linkers, and the Yellow King himself as well, looked at the about 15cm of silver grey metal sticking out of the armor.



# Chapter 7

“Wh... who?”

Haruyuki whispered in a sound that was not a voice.

To be able to get close behind the suspicious Yellow King, furthermore, to be able to penetrate that armor like paper without the use of a special skill. No, before that, to cut in between a direct contact fight between two Kings, who would think of doing that?

Then, as if hearing Haruyuki’s sound, from behind the Yellow King, a shadow melted slowly into view. Blending into the twilight almost perfectly, a deep grey silhouette. At the moment its surface was touched lightly by the remaining sunlight, it shone with wet reflection.



The mysterious intruder's body was fully covered with black, silvery mirror-like armor. The color combination could be said to be similar to Silver Crow, but the form is largely different. The shoulders, chest and elbows had volume, with a heavy feeling like a knight from the Middle Ages. The right hand that was covered by a huge gauntlet, held a double-edged sword of the same length as his height, its extreme tip narrowed as it pierced through the Yellow King from behind.

What drew attention more strongly than the sword, was the knight's head.

It was covered with a hood type helmet that had long horns

extending behind from either side. However, in the place that was originally a face - there was nothing. Shone on by the sunlight, the interior should be clearly seen, but like a manifestation of darkness, the inside of the hood was painted all black. No, if he stared at it longer, he certainly could see something unknown, deep black and wriggling as though it's alive, on the surface.

The knight of dark silver with a mask of darkness.

That name, right before Niko, who was under him leaked it out, Haruyuki too, realized what it was. That was probably... That must be—

“«Disaster Armor»... «Chrome Disaster».”

Right after hoarsely leaking that out, Niko continued.

“Why. Way too early. There should be at least a whole day left.”

The reason she was surprised, Haruyuki soon realized.

Chrome Disaster's real self, «Cherry Rook» who is a level 6 Burst Linker belonging to the Red legion, and while the train he was riding on was about 2 minutes from Ikebukuro, Haruyuki's group dived into this Unlimited Neutral Field. Here, the time flows at 1000 times of the real world, so that 2 minutes is about equal to 33 hours.

There could only be one answer. Cherry Rook who was taken over by that armor, accelerated while he was riding the train, and appeared in this world.

If it was a normal duel with 1.8 second max, that is understandable. However this place is an upper world, where one is unable to leave from anywhere aside from one of the Leap Points once dived in. In a place close to others, such as a train, not to mention, leaving the real body behind on a form of transportation, that is an action that surpassed bravery into recklessness.

“Cherry... To be unable to wait for even 2 minutes, is he already that far gone?”

Niko whispered in a muffled voice.

However, Haruyuki did not seem to sense that kind of madness from the fifth Chrome Disaster standing across the crater, on its far

west edge.

The stature is not all that powerful. At most 170cm, and compared to the fourth that Kuroyukihime showed them in the playfield yesterday, this one is very small. The form had an orthodox human shape. While holding the sword that pierced through the Yellow King, he did not seem to be doing anything else, spacing out like expression as he stood there quietly.

Why did the Yellow King not escape? Why did he turn his head to the limit and look at Chrome Disaster silently?

That answer - .

Once second later, Haruyuki found out.

“Yuruoooooo...!”

Suddenly, there was a strange scream.

It was not a human's sound. Not a beast's. Not a machine's. He had never heard it before, a heterogeneous roar.

The source was the deep darkness lurking about the knight's face. From under the bent backward hood type helmet, with the yell, a tangible darkness was blown out, and it slowly formed into a solid shape.

On the hood's top and bottom came a set of teeth, a sequence of sharp triangles. Fangs. Deep black fangs, from the hood's edge, as if that was all one mouth, they stuck out.

‘Gupaa’.

With that wet sound, the «mouth» opened.

From the deep darkness inside, two small round eyes, shone with a vaporous red.

At the moment he saw that, the Yellow King, Yellow Radio finally moved. He turned behind with a snap, and held the sword that pierced him with both hands, trying to pull it out.

The reason he did not move till now was - he cowered. Bound by terror.

Kuroyukihime who was also nearby, continued to be silent in her

stance. She did not seem afraid, but he sensed a slight hesitation in her. There was a chance to attack, but which should she aim for, to be certain in this situation, she could not decide.

To the Yellow King who was trying to pull the sword out, the Disaster Armor, Chrome Disaster brought his huge «mouth» near as if eating something on a fork. That jaw that was opened wide, closed in on the clown avatar's round raised shoulders - the fangs dripping a clear mucus -

“...«Deceit Firecracker»!!”

Before his shoulder was bitten, Yellow Radio shouted in a loud voice.

With a poisonous yellow smoke going up, the skewered avatar blew up, and disappeared.

‘Self destruct!?’ Haruyuki’s eyes popped out, however right after that, about five meters away, a similar colored smoke went up, and he saw the clown jumping out from inside. That was probably a dazzle and escape special skill.

While his breastplate with a sharp hole was giving out small sparks, the Yellow King dashed back another few meters. After he indicated to his subordinates' avatars to gather, he finally released a sound.

“You starving dog, forgetting your owner’s kindness, and want to disturb my program? ...Fine then, if you are that hungry - eat the «Black» one in front of you!! It’s not too tantalizing a color for appetite though!!”

He laughed with ‘Hahahahaha’, but that sound echoed with a tension that was not even disguised.

As the black jaw opened and closed with ‘Gachin Gachin’ sounds, Chrome Disaster looked from the Black King to the Yellow King, who were at an equal distance away. That action did not have the feel of a player trying to decide who to «Duel» with.

It’s the gesture of a beast figuring out which prey he is supposed to hunt.

The face that was not a face, casually turned towards the bottom of the crater. His look stopped for a moment at the damaged and silent Red King, however he did not show any feelings upon seeing his

own legion master, then moved his face towards Haruyuki who was standing on the stabilizer on her back.

Suddenly.

‘- Feed.’

‘- Feed, become meat.’

What's more terrifying than anything else, no matter how you listen to the tone of voice itself, which was from a similar aged boy before his voice changed.

In his back, a fear that he had never experienced in the accelerated world thus far, he now felt it.

Even with Brain Burst's strange «Accelerate» technology, it is still just a duel fighting game. After arriving in this south Ikebukuro crater, he had been in a gruesome to the extreme battle, but that was still barely within the scope of a game.

To be truthful, if the Yellow King's trap succeeded with Niko or Kuroyukihime being hunted, those two's Brain Burst would be forcefully uninstalled, and they would never be able to visit the accelerated world again - however, that is a «Game Ending», but their real life will continue afterwards.

But even so.

If that voice now, belonging to the Burst Linker called Chrome Disaster.

Inside that black silver armor, the boy called Cherry Rook that should have enjoyed this game no longer exists.

‘Enhanced armaments will erode its user's mind’, Kuroyukihime had said. Haruyuki half believed that, but the humanity of the person wearing the armor will mostly be lost, that short sound now clearly showed him. And that condition was probably not just limited to during acceleration. Whoever is in that armor, he would never think that person would be peacefully living in the real world.

“Niko... He, no longer.”

The meaning Haruyuki's shaky voice tried to convey, the Red King guessed with her sensitivity.

“Don’t say it. Still.. still, we might make it in time. If we destroy that armor now, maybe.”

That quiet voice, did not finish till the end.

As if to reject Niko’s wish, Chrome Disaster again released another roar.

“Ruuoo...oooooo!!”

What he slowly turned to face, was the Yellow King’s direction.

Carrying the large sword in his right hand on his shoulder, his left hand with five huge claw-like fingers was extended straight forward.

Right after that, a surprising phenomenon happened. Even though the Armor did not shout any skill name, right next to the Yellow King’s gathered group, a red type avatar was sucked to Chrome Disaster’s left hand at a fierce speed.

With a ‘Gachin’ metallic sound, the unfortunate duel avatar’s body was penetrated by the Armor’s fingers.

“Hii...”

While loudly screaming, that red type tried to point the rifle held in his right hand towards the armor’s head. It was then, that Haruyuki realized that red type was the long range type protecting that jamming avatar earlier.

The rifle’s barrel opening shone, and a blue white beam was fired at point blank range.

However, just before that, the right arm holding the gun was cut off at the base. The beam grazed Chrome Disaster’s helmet, and passed behind him. The sword slash that cut off that arm, Haruyuki could not even see most of it.

Right after that.

“Ruuuu!!”

With that yell, Chrome Disaster’s closed fangs all opened wide at once.

The red type’s left shoulder was bitten by that jaw of darkness with

a ‘Crunch’ sound.

“Gya... aaaaa!!”

The scream that was sent out was so grisly that he wanted to cover his ears. In this Unlimited Neutral Field, the damage pain is increased twice that of lower fields. Probably right now, for that red type, he is feeling the same level of pain as being bitten by a beast on his real body.

That avatar’s armor was pierced through easily by the tens of huge fangs. From shoulder to chest area, a half circle shape was eaten, and the cut left arm fell slowly to the ground.

“Aaa... Aaaaa - !!”

With his stomach exposed, and both arms lost, pain made the avatar’s head violently flap around.

After swallowing completely, Chrome Disaster opened his «mouth» wide again, and swallowed that head whole.

With a wet ‘Crunch’ sound, some spray was released, was it spark effect, armor fragments - or maybe that avatar’s flesh and blood.

The scream was fully cut off. With its whole head lost, that avatar’s remains slid down strengthlessly, and a few seconds later, finally dissolved and split into a light pillar.

Haruyuki thought that his view was shaking. The reason for that were his own knees shaking, which took him a while to realize.

That was no longer a «Duel».

Not violence, nor slaughter.

It’s «predation». The captured avatar’s blood and meat, and also Burst Points being consumed, just that kind of instinctive activity.

At the same time the top and bottom black fangs stop moving, on the connections between the black silver armor, Haruyuki saw a deep red light run around. As if not just points, some kind of energy was stolen kind of phenomenon - that was probably what Kuroyukihime said yesterday, the HP gauge absorption ability, «Drain».

“Ruuuuu...”

Chrome Disaster lifted his head up and that low throat rumble came out.

“Rabid dog... no choice, it’s a shame the show will be canceled. Everyone, retreat to the Ikebukuro train station Leap Point!!”

That shout came from the Yellow King. At the time of his directive, he used some kind of special skill, and the around ten remaining Yellow legion members’ shapes became half transparent.

The avatars that became vaporous shadows, left the crater at a tremendous pace, and retreated northwest. Even though his plan clearly failed, the Yellow King’s sound that was moving farther away, his final sneer spread in the field.

“Kukuku... Red, and Black, to my circus’ fun fun carnival, I will someday invite you again! Get eaten up by that dog, if you still have fighting spirit... if only! Kukuku... Kufufufufu...”

If they thought calmly, they could interfere with those people’s retreat and let Chrome Disaster attack them, then take the Yellow King’s head in the confusion, that kind of tactic might be possible. However Haruyuki, not only did he not make a sound, he did not even move a finger. He was paralyzed like a small animal being glared at by a predator, and it was all he could do to stand above Scarlet Rain’s armor plate.

‘- To fight with that? Make him unable to fight, and at super close range attack him with «Judgement Blow»? I am supposed to help with that?

Impossible.

I cannot do it. I am my limit not screaming and running away from this place.’

While Haruyuki’s knees and the roots of his teeth shook slightly, in his view, Chrome Disaster’s body sunk. It was the action of a carnivorous beast wanting to chase and kill the Yellow legion members that were running away like baby spiders being spread apart.

‘Just go away with the Yellow legion like that’, Haruyuki prayed. However.

Behind Chrome Disaster who was going to start a fierce dash - .

“...«Death By Piercing»!!”

The confident echo was Kuroyukihime’s voice.

The right sword arm that was held by the left hand, was thrust straight forward with a jet engine-like loud noise. The violet shine that covered the blade, brilliantly painted the world, as it extended close to 5 meters in a direct line.

The huge attack power that was released compressed the virtual air, and the view there was distorted like flickering flames. A ‘Gakiin’ kind of high pitched destruction sound echoed - but what was cut apart, was just the right side, the bent back horn on Chrome Disaster’s helmet.

The black silver Armor, in the biggest opening right before starting a chase, and furthermore aimed at from behind, with a mist like movement slid left to avoid the attack.

The horn that danced high, came down while spinning, and stuck into the blue black ground.

“...Ooh, you managed to avoid that.”

While she brought back her extended right hand, Kuroyukihime said it as if impressed.

Against that, Chrome Disaster who had turned around, between the huge fangs, a clearly angry moan resounded.

“Yurururuuuu...”

With a ‘Clink’ sound, the large sword in his right hand cut a half circle on the ground.

Picking that up to carry on the right shoulder, the demonic knight faced the deep black beautiful princess. Inside the slightly opened jaw that was under the hood, the deep red light eyes sharply shone as they moved around.

“Se... sen, pa...”

Haruyuki’s dried up parched throat leaked out a raspy sound.

‘- You want to fight? Even though it’s the Red King’s request - against that. Face to face.’

The truth was, Chrome Disaster is still level 7. Even if she loses, unlike against a «King» opponent, she won't lose Brain Burst.

But, in exchange, she will be eaten.

In the field with the same or higher pain sensation as reality, while alive, the avatar being greedily eaten. That pain cannot be compared to being hit by the gun in Haruyuki's own self made training room.

No, it's not just a problem with the pain sensation. A few minutes ago, the long range type avatar that was captured by *that*, his scream echoed with deep despair. The despair of being captured by an overwhelming predator, and being consumed while helpless.

'No way. I don't want to be eaten by that. If it became like that, I will - '

Strength suddenly left his legs, and Haruyuki knelt down on top of Scarlet Rain's armor plate. He tried to stand up in a hurry, but his body did not move. Even his fingers were hard and stiff, frozen while ignoring his commands.

'- What is this? What is happening to me? Earlier, I said things in such a patronizing way to Kuroyukihime who was lying there, and now I've become so unsightly and unable to move.'

The more he panicked, the colder his whole body went. As if the nerves of the avatar's limbs were cut.

For Haruyuki who was just breathing shallowly under his silver mask, in his ears - .

“«Burst Linkers with no fighting spirit cannot move their duel avatar».”

From the crater's edge while she faced off with the black silver Armor, Kuroyukihime's dignified voice reached him.

“...Earlier, it is as that little girl said. I don't want to admit it, but I regretted the betrayal two years ago. I felt it was an unforgivable crime. So with that, *my fighting spirit - the fighting feeling that made me want victory*, I feared it to the bottom of my heart.”

While being vigilant with both sword arms held up, Black Lotus' blue purple color eyes glanced in Haruyuki's direction.

“However Haruyuki-kun. You are the opposite. You fear losing. You think that losing will lower your worth. That, during the recent territory battles, was the reason for your bad condition.”

Those were words that were relentlessly forced deep into his heart.

While kneeling, Haruyuki opened his eyes wide, and strongly ground his teeth.

‘- It’s not just thinking, that’s the truth!’

He shouted that in his brain.

‘ If I lost I would obtain nothing. My, Silver Crow’s value for existing is to continue to win with the one and only «Flight ability». Leveling up and expanding the territory of «Nega Nabulas», to fulfill your expectations only.’

‘ Because, if I don’t win, if I don’t become stronger, you will surely - someday see me as...’

“I will return the same words from earlier, Haruyuki-kun!”

After a slash of her right sword hand, Kuroyukihime shouted fiercely.

“The bond linking you and me, is it just to such a degree... do you really think that way!!”

And then right after that, she started to slash at Chrome Disaster.

As if, with that action, she wanted to convey something to Haruyuki.

Kuroyukihime’s left sword hand that started the attack from high above, was met by Disaster’s huge sword, and a tremendous impact happened. The ball like energy that appeared shone onto the black and silver armor surface, then bounced away and dispersed in numerous dots of light.

Both were fiercely knocked back, slid to a stop while gouging the ground, then with almost the same timing attacked again. Disaster’s huge sword in both hands was swung horizontally. Kuroyukihime did a spin and blocked it with a right kick.

The fierce big attacks that drew deep red and blue purple arcs, caused an actual explosion this time, and a small crater appeared at

that place. Both of them were blown flying in opposite directions, Kuroyukihime who got up after tumbling around - was faced directly with Chrome Disaster's wide open left hand.

‘- It’s that skill!’

Not being able to move, nor able to speak aloud, Haruyuki held his breath.

The special skill that sucked in the enemy with a mysterious attraction and held its target. If she got hit by that, then she wouldn’t be able to swing her swords properly in close contact, and will only be eaten at will.

He thought he saw a silver flash between them.

At the same time, Kuroyukihime had a large lump in front of her that appeared at an unknown time, she placed her right sword foot flat side on it and kicked it up. That was a piece of rock broken from the ground in the earlier explosion.

Chrome Disaster’s palm sucked that rock in at a fierce speed. To the enemy avatar that was shaking off the hard rock that his fingers had deeply pierced, Kuroyukihime started charging at full speed.

‘Gyaan!’ With the release of the sound of metallic impact, the left sword foot was stuck into Chrome Disaster’s breast armor after a kick.

‘...Incredible.’

Haruyuki momentarily forgot the lethargy that bound him, and whispered inside his brain.

Against that terrifying opponent, how could she fight like that? It could be said that her level is higher, but the strength difference is filled in by the enhanced armament, their power is about the same. With a mistake, she will be eaten by those huge fangs, and will actually taste sharp pain and despair. Why that way - as if - .

As if she was enjoying it.

Is it because she has confidence? Since she truly believes that she is stronger than the enemy that she can move that freely?

No, that could not be true. The same level 9 Yellow Radio, even

with ten subordinates remaining, fled without hesitation. He could not absolutely say that decision came from fear. Chrome Disaster is no longer a normal Burst Linker. His threat might be beyond the huge «Enemy» Haruyuki saw while on way to Ikebukuro.

As if to support Haruyuki's awareness, the crazed knight showed him a fearsome phenomenon.

A red black light concentrated on the wound that was cut in the armor by Kuroyukihime, and it slowly flowed to start reviving.

“Yururuu...”

A laughter like low sound leaked from the Armor, then he suddenly started a fast and furious counter attack. The sword in his right hand swung down at an unseen speed, cutting from the air towards the ground in a straight line. Kuroyukihime managed to avoid that path with her miraculous reaction, but with a ‘Pikin’ faint sound, the left tip of the armor skirt on her waist was cut off.

Chrome Disaster’s attack did not stop there. The huge sword with a meter and half long blade, flashed again and again with a speed that made the blade seem weightless. Black Lotus who dodged with a dance like movement, or continued to block, slowly had her elegant armor carved with lines here and there.

In the rush that continued limitlessly, even though she was slowly pushed from the crater’s west edge to the north edge, Kuroyukihime’s fighting spirit did not seem to weaken at all.

With four sword limbs shining violet, she looked for small openings in Disaster’s actions and countered with sharp attacks. Even though the opponent’s armor soon repaired the carved wounds with red light, she simply and accurately stabbed, cut or thrust again and again.

There would be no way that she does not feel fear. With similar attack power, speed, and accuracy, against an opponent that can automatically repair itself, she will eventually be pushed back for sure. If she got hit by the heavy attack even once and her ability to dodge became dull, she will be captured by the opponent at that moment, and a part of her body will be chewed up. Her pride of being a «King» will be robbed, and she will just become food crawling on the ground.

And yet - why...

“Why... are you not escaping!”

From Haruyuki’s throat, a hoarse call leaked out.

Running away won’t lower the Black King’s value. The Yellow King already ran away, and actually, when the previous generation Chrome Disaster was taken down, you said it took an alliance of «Pure Color Seven Kings» to finally stop him right. This is a situation where retreat is a matter of course. Also, above all else -

‘I don’t want to see it. That person being broken and eaten while screaming, absolutely don’t want to see it.’

“Please run away, senpai!”

Haruyuki called out again.

However, right after that.

The iron sword, was swung down from high above with a timing and speed that did not allow it to be avoided.

Kuroyukihime crossed her two sword hands and blocked it, but she was not able to be pushed back like it had been till now, and knelt down on one knee there. A thunder like clashing sound echoed, and the ground around Kuroyukihime cracked in a radiating way.

“Yururuoooooooo!!”

Maybe he was sure of his victory, Chrome Disaster roared loudly. The sword that was held in both of his hands, was pressed down with all his weight. With ‘Gii Gii’ hard grinding sounds, small sparks flew out from the contact point of the three blades.

It’s the same situation as when she went against the Yellow legion’s fighter type avatar, however this time the one who was pushed back was clearly Black Lotus. The blue purple aura that surrounded her two sword hands slowly dimmed, and blinked irregularly.

Very soon, her body will be cut apart along with her two swords and she’ll probably suffer large damage. She will get jumped on where she fell, and until her HP gauge was gone, she will be chewed apart at will.

“Why... did you not run away.”

Haruyuki murmured without any strength.

It would not be for protecting Haruyuki who could not move. She attacked Chrome Disaster who was about to chase the Yellow legion, and it was Kuroyukihime who pulled him back herself. That means Kuroyukihime intentionally went against that Armor, furthermore she chose a fight with no chance of winning.

To be truthful that was their goal for diving into the Unlimited Neutral Field, but the situation had already greatly differed from what they had predicted. Takumu who «died» won't be revived for a few tens of minutes, and the important Scarlet Rain is majorly damaged so she could not move.

And yet, why did that person - .

“This is... my obstinacy, Haruyuki-kun.”

Suddenly, words echoed.

Looking up at the blade closing in front of her with her shining violet eyes, Kuroyukihime said in a calm and heavy sound.

“This time, I became unsightly in front of you. As your mentor... and also your «parent», I cannot face you like that in the real world.”

During that time, Chrome Disaster's sword moved closer to Black Lotus' mask bit by bit. Haruyuki took a breath, and ground out a sound from his shaking throat.

“O... obstinacy...? But... if you lose, then whatever... meaning...”

“That is what you are mistaken about. A «Clever Retreat» while you get eaten up by a dog! That kind of thing does not have any value! Once you dive into the battle field... no matter who the opponent is, you have to fight once!!”

The proud words released by Kuroyukihime as she is just about to lose, hit Haruyuki like an iron club.

Inside his brain, the many battles and accelerated feelings that he had experienced till now came flashing back.

Earlier, when he wanted to take down the jamming avatar and had to avoid the supporter's laser attack. When he slipped through the Red King's fierce anti-air fire. And then three months ago, when he had just became a Burst Linker, and he held up Ash Roller's bike, or

when he saw through Cyan Pile's special skill.

‘- Inside me, I should not have the desire to win nor the fear of losing. Just fought like a dream. Without being noticed by anyone.’

‘- I see. What I am afraid of, is not the loss itself. It’s when I lose, being laughed at by the gallery. Being compared to Takumu. And also disappointing that person, I had feared those all along. Not only in reality, even in the accelerated world, caring just «how others look at me» - this kind of thing...’

“...A huge fool, that’s what I am.”

After whispering, Haruyuki put strength into his right hand that was frozen and stayed open without power.

It squeaked with ‘Gishi Gishi’ sounds, however the five fingers held tightly together.

He held that fist straight up, and hit his right cheek with all his strength. With a ‘Gatsun’ kind of impact sound, a burning pain ran along his inner teeth. That burning sensation went through all of his virtual nerves, sending signals to his four limbs.

He held his head up. On the crater’s north edge, Black Lotus tried her last resistance against the lethal blade. The dully colored edges of her crossed blades were pushed barely above her head, and the sparks that flew apart displayed her armor’s many scars.

“...Senpai!”

Haruyuki shouted. At the same time, he expanded his wings that now have power, and flew straight out.

Gliding along the crater’s bottom at almost full speed, he flew towards the edge that was Chrome Disaster’s blind spot.

“U... Oo!”

With his roar, the punch that was aimed for the black silver armor, was barely blocked by the right gauntlet.

However, at the moment when one hand was removed from the sword, Kuroyukihime thrust her two hands forward with a psyche.

With a ‘Gaan!’ impact sound, the blade was bounced away, and Chrome Disaster was pushed back a few meters. It did not seem to

disturb his stance, and he soon held his sword low, while under the hood the fangs fiercely grinded.

“Ruruu... Ruoo...!!”

That sound, was clearly filled with anger.

While his whole body shook with terror, Haruyuki stood against that, and covered Black Lotus behind him. Maybe she used up all her strength, Kuroyukihime stuck one arm on the ground as a cane, and eventually stood up with that, then moved to Haruyuki's left side.

“Then, Haruyuki-kun. - For one game, let's lose in a cool way.”

Haruyuki involuntarily made a wry smile, and nodded.

“Yes, senpai.”

He lowered his waist, spread his legs apart, and took a martial art like stance.

Kuroyukihime who was beside him too, held her sword hands up and got ready.

One second later, a few things happened one after another.

Chrome Disaster roared in anger and lifted his sword up.

For Haruyuki who was concentrating on that slash, on his left side, he saw some kind of shining light.

Kuroyukihime's right sword hand flashed with a fierce speed - and the flat side of her sword hit Haruyuki's chest with all her strength.

He was knocked flying behind easily, and while he was tumbling on the ground with surprise, he saw a crimson wall of light in front of him.

From his left side - he realized it was a beam attack fired from center of the crater, and with the fearsome scaled explosion that was initiated, he was again blown flying back, more than ten meters this time. He used both hands in reaction to protect himself from the oncoming heat and shock wave, even so the HP gauge in his view's upper left lowered, and his body gave out unpleasant metallic sounds here and there.

All of his nerves felt sharp pain and burning sensation on them, so Haruyuki just lay on the ground with arms and legs open while breathing hard. He could not even scream, and while he waited for the pain of his shaking body to lessen, a huge question marked wind blew in his head.

Why did that happen - the Yellow legion should have retreated without leaving a single long range type behind. Or did they come back half way and cut into the fight? But with that kind of power. It's not just a gun. It's a tank's - no, a battleship's main gun kind of overwhelming power.

When he waveringly pushed himself up with his right hand that finally had feeling returned, in front of his eyes.

With a 'Gashaa' kind of hard sound, something fell.

A deeply cracked, pieces missing black armor. The transparent gloss was lost, only brutal scorch marks remained. From the four swords, the left arm and left leg ones were half broken, the mirror face goggles also had spider web like cracks running on it.

"Ku..."

Haruyuki put out a raspy sound, and his sharp pain was blown away and forgotten.

"Kuroyukihime senpai!!"

He held her up in a daze, and from various places on her body many black fragments fell down. The avatar that lay slack without any strength was very light, from the damaged places, blue purple sparks that looked like blood came spraying out.

In front of him, came another heavy metallic sound. He lifted his head up on reaction, and saw that a bit away, the shape of Chrome Disaster kneeling on one knee with head lowered. His damage was also severe. The black silver armor was covered with soot, and a few places had large depressions. Inside the hood type helmet, there was unstable darkness, and the sword that flew somewhere could not be seen.

The destruction even changed the terrain of the field.

The Ikebukuro crater north edge that became the battle field till now was carved another small crater, with places burning and thick

smoke going up. The cannon fire cut through everything and went north, buildings were uprooted and mow down, and a new road was made going towards the Green highway.

And then finally, Haruyuki fearfully turned his head south.

The scene that his eyes captured, Haruyuki had already half guessed. However he did not want to believe it. He determined logically that there could be nothing else, but his feeling strongly resisted it, and that conflict became tears that distorted his vision.

“Why... why did you do that... Niko.”

The fortress avatar that he thought was so broken that it could no longer move, the Red King, Scarlet Rain’s right arm main cannon was lifted up, pointing straight at the center of the new crater. The large size gun barrel released heat, and the haze made the surrounding waver.

The attack that was fired from that cannon - probably the highest rank special attack skill, swallowed Kuroyukihime and Chrome Disaster whole, and there was no doubt about the huge damage it caused.

Haruyuki grinded his teeth, and look at Niko’s eyes in between the armor plates. However those red lens did not take notice of Haruyuki nor Black Lotus that was in his arms.

“...Why!!”

Haruyuki screamed, and the Red King remained silent. In exchange the thrusters on her back and bottom sides shone, and the huge body that was the «Immobile Fortress» slowly started to move forward.

When it started moving, it was surprisingly fast, and it quickly shrunk the crater’s radius distance.

“Ruu... u...”

That moan, came from Chrome Disaster who curved up like a wounded beast. Sensing the approach of the Red King, it crawled on all fours and waveringly retreated north. From the many wounds on the armor, red black «Automatic Repair» lights covering them can be seen. However the wounds were way too deep, and they could not be easily healed.

As if chasing a knight that lost and ran away, the crimson fortress' shape appeared on the crater's edge. That majesty, Haruyuki looked at while crying.

“Wh... y...”

His shaking voice, once again leaked from his throat. At that moment, the fortress stopped its forward movement.

Turning to look up at the avatar standing right in front of him, Haruyuki took a deep breath and called out.

“Niko! ...No, Scarlet Rain!! You haven't forgotten right... if you take down senpai... Black Lotus will lose all her points!!”

Kuroyukihime in his arm, still remained unconscious. From the degree of damage, it can be clearly seen that her HP gauge has little remaining.

To Haruyuki's accusation, the Red King replied in one short sentence with no feeling.

“*What about it.*”

To the speechless Haruyuki, he was continued to be showered by a young yet cold sound.

“For a Burst Linker, any Burst Linker aside from yourself is an enemy. If you get taken down by an enemy you lose points. When it becomes zero, you are forever retired. That is all it is about.”

“B... but... we... you and us are...”

“Comrades?”

With a heavy sound, Scarlet Rain's main cannon hit the burnt ground. A blade sharp sound, cut through the air in the last remaining sunlight.

“You guys are so sweet that it makes me want to puke! Listen, I will teach you one final thing. In the accelerated world... something that you can believe in doesn't exist!! Comrades, friends, legion... and also «Parent Child»'s bonds, are all just illusions!!”

With her shout that was like blazing flames, at the same time, the Red King removed all of her badly damaged armor containers.

From inside the enhanced armament that disappeared like melting into air, a delicate avatar appeared, and it jumped down onto the ground.

The crimson female type avatar's armor, still maintained a ruby like shine even now. However only the front part of her left elbow was cruelly full of cracks, and small sparks flew out.

That should be hurting, but with an action as if she isn't feeling it, she straightened her back and the avatar's face turned slightly towards Haruyuki. Inside the two round lens, he seem to see a high temperature flame roaring.

"...After I have disposed of that guy, I will deal with you guys properly. If you don't like it, run away right now. The next time we meet... we are enemies."

After informing him with a cold voice, the Red King looked back ahead. She pulled her large handgun from her waist, and slid the gun body while walking away.

Where she was heading, was towards Chrome Disaster, with his whole body wounds showing blood color lights, he crawled straight north. He was supposed to be closer to the center of the explosion than Kuroyukihime, so he must have really surprising stamina to be able to still move like that. However, right now he cannot move at half of Niko's walking speed, so it's impossible for him to retreat.

While holding the heavily wounded Kuroyukihime in both arms, in Haruyuki's view, the two avatars that were slowly closing the distance gap looked blurred.

If it was rational judgement, thinking that Niko's previous announcement might be acted out, he should escape to Ikebukuro station or Sunshine City Leap Point right now.

However Haruyuki did not move. No, he did not want to move.

If he escaped, then something that is mistaken might be confirmed as a fact. He felt it like that.

Near the exit of one of the block of buildings that the huge beam mowed down to be a road, Niko finally caught up to Chrome Disaster, and casually lifted up her right foot. With a 'Crunch' like metallic noise, she kicked the knight avatar down, and the back of his neck was stepped on by Niko's left foot.

That was an unspeakably sad sight, Haruyuki felt.

To be sure, that devilish armor should be eliminated. And then, to score a special attack on that guy with the transcendental reaction speed, it is also true that he could only be aimed at while he was right before a confrontation with Kuroyukihime.

However - then, what about that night.

In Haruyuki's home living room, Niko and Kuroyukihime hugging as if they longed for each other while they slept. Surpassing the fate that «Kings» must eventually fight each other, he felt a larger «bond» between the two girls. That scene that made Haruyuki want to cry as he thought of it, was it just one night's illusion? Just a meaningless coincidence?

Scarlet Rain pushed the handgun in her right hand at the back of Chrome Disaster's head.

Somehow not able to bear looking at what's coming up, Haruyuki lowered his head.

- The gun's sound, however, he could not hear no matter how long he waited.

In exchange, near his ear, a weak sound was issued.

“...Ex-actly... this is why, children... I dislike them...”

It was the wounded, painfully wavering Kuroyukihime's voice. However in it, there was not a single bit of anger. Haruyuki lifted his head up, and looked at Kuroyukihime's goggles that were close by.

Inside them, a faint violet light shone. He pushed down the things welling up, and Haruyuki whispered to Kuroyukihime.

“Se... sen-pa...”

He then heard a ‘Gyariin’ metallic sound at that time.

What Haruyuki saw after moving his view was, Chrome Disaster with upper body turned around, and his left hand raised up high. And Scarlet Rain with her right hand-armor fragments scattering.

Dancing high in the sky, was the crimson handgun.

“Wh... why, did you not shoot!!”

Haruyuki shouted without thinking.

There was plenty of time for her as a legion master to use the member punishment «Judgement Blow» to hit Chrome Disaster. To execute that, Niko involved Kuroyukihime in her special attack, and spewed out all those cruel words. Why did she hesitate now?

The one who answered his raising questions, was Kuroyukihime in his arms.

“...That, little girl... is just sulking. Painful... and lonely, so throwing a tantrum...”

“Wh... what!?”

Surprised, Haruyuki looked between his arms and the rubble, and saw Chrome Disaster’s right hand that flashed like a lightning bolt, caught Niko’s throat.

With the right arm that regained a lot of power, he slowly hung the small avatar up. Niko’s right hand held the Armor’s arm, be she did not seem to resist beyond that, and just dangled down. As if, she gave up on everything, after being thrown away.

“That little girl truly... seeks trust more than anyone. As a Burst Linker’s final bond...”

Kuroyukihime murmured in a quiet voice. Haruyuki opened his eyes wide in a daze and asked in return.

“Bo... bond...?”

“That is... correct. I can understand. Those two are... «Parent Child». The Red King is... Disaster’s... no, Cherry Rook’s «child».”

Parent and Child - !? Those two!?

Till now, he had not thought of it like that even once. However, being told that, he can comprehend just one thing.

In the real world, Niko was able to track Cherry Rook’s position in detail. Haruyuki guessed that it was a legion master’s privilege, but it was not that. Niko simply knows about Cherry Rook’s «Real» side. The one and only «parent» who gave her Brain Burst.

Haruyuki was again surprised, and while he was speechless, his eyes saw Kuroyukihime's gentle eyes return his look. She lifted up her badly damaged right hand, and knocked Haruyuki on the shoulder.

"Hey, what are you doing. I am... fine. Go and help... Niko... our comrade."

At that instant.

From Haruyuki's eyes, unsuppressed tears flowed out.

He did not understand the reason. However, he felt that some kind of huge hot thing born inside his chest, and wanted to rise.

"...Yes!"

He gave a big nod.

After laying Kuroyukihime's body flat there, Haruyuki stood up. With a sharp sound, he opened the wings on his back wide.

Far away, Niko who was hung up, Chrome Disaster's jaw closed in on the top of her shoulder. Haruyuki took a deep breath, and held his right hand in a fist - .

"...Ooo!"

With that roar, fiercely kicked the ground.

After a few steps of running, he flapped the two wings of metallic fins with all his strength.

His feet left the ground, and Haruyuki became a silver beam that shot forward into the sky.

Towards the far away rubble road, where the mad Armor was about to devour Niko - his own Linker «child»'s body, Haruyuki closed in bit by bit. With his right fist strongly held together, and body leaning forward -

"Stop ittt!"

With that yell, Haruyuki's fist that was covered by blinding light, hit the deep black jaw in the center.

With a 'Crunch' sound, the silver flash split open the lurking

darkness. After a pause, as if repulsed by an explosive force, Chrome Disaster was bent back and blown flying away. He bounced on the rubble, then rolled more than ten meters, and fell down with his arms and legs spread apart.

After folding his wings and landing, Haruyuki found out with a glance that «Punch» just now cost half of his special attack gauge, then he looked down at the crimson avatar kneeling beside him.

Niko who was holding her throat that was caught by Disaster and coughing, lifted her head and glared at Haruyuki with eyes that had flames returned to them.

“Y... you bastard... why...”

“I came to help you.”

With the heat rising up from the bottom of his body, he used a more violent speech style that he normally would not have.

“We are... comrades, that’s why.”

Niko who was momentary breathless, stiffened her body, and wrung out a raspy sound.

“This, bastard... even though you are a small fry, trying to be... cool...”

“You too, even though you are a King, how long are you planning to be so poor.”

Haruyuki kicked the crimson handgun that had fallen right by him with his right foot up, and grabbed the barrel in the air.

He held the grip out to Niko, and continued saying.

“...He, Cherry Rook can only be helped by you, Niko. For him, Brain Burst is just a curse now. Release him from it.”

Inside the round lens, red lights wavered with hesitation.

But one second later, her extended right hand, strongly grabbed the gun.

“Aa... I know. I understand.”

With that whisper, the Red King that soon stood up, stepped on the

ground with her left foot loudly as if to shake off something, and looked forward.

Chrome Disaster that was blown away, was raising his upper body at that moment. Holding his face that was hit by Haruyuki with his right hand, and his throat rang in panic.

He probably no longer has the strength to stand up. The red black light that was trying to repair his whole body's damage had mostly disappeared, and instead from the wounds drips of darkness came out like blood.

“Cherry.”

Niko called with a quiet sound as her feet stepped out.

“Let’s end it. The game that is just painful and tough, there’s no meaning to continue.”

In between the fingers that were covering the helmet, Chrome Disaster’s red eyes faintly shining could be seen.

He lifted up the left hand that was pushing on the ground, with an ‘I surrender’, like gesture the palm faced the sky.

‘Did he regain his rationality?’ Haruyuki thought that for an instant.

- However.

Suddenly, without any preparation, the heavy looking black silver avatar danced up with fierce speed.

“What...”

In the view of Haruyuki who shouted, at a steel beam that was sticking out the top of a mostly broken down five storey building, Disaster had reached that place. He turned backwards, and again, as if sucked in by the air, jumped above.

While staring at the shape that got smaller and smaller, Haruyuki blurted out.

“Fl... «Flight Ability»!?”

“Wrong, it’s «Super Long Distance Jump»!”

Niko answered in an urgent sound.

“...He wants to logout at the Sunshine City Leap Point. If he escape from here... there won’t be another chance...”

Cherry Rook that is covered by that armor, must have realized that his «child», legion master Niko traced his movements with some kind of method. After logging out, he would surely find a counter for that, and then the «Wait and Ambush in Unlimited Neutral Field» kind of tactic could not be used again.

Haruyuki ground his inner teeth, then stared at the Red King and said.

“Niko. This time be sure to shoot. The «Judgement Blow».”

“...Long-winded. I will shoot. For his sake.”

“Then...”

Finally, it’s time for the original plan with Silver Crow to chase and capture Chrome Disaster to start. After that, all he has to do is fly. With that determination, Haruyuki clearly announced.

“...Until Niko catches up, I will hold Disaster down.”

After an instant of speechlessness, Niko tilted her head slightly.

“O... one person is impossible! Even though you can say he is wounded, he can still move like that. Instead of capturing him, you would be eaten up!”

“...”

Haruyuki took a quick glance at the deep black shape that was still lying far south at the crater’s edge.

Soon his eyes turned back, and said forcefully.

“Then I will hold out till being eaten at that time!”

With a ‘Crunch’ rubble sound he changed his direction - .

Haruyuki opened his wings wide, and left the ground in a straight line.

He flew out of the half broken buildings, and gained altitude, then soon saw the dully shining avatar. He had already went about 300 meters northeast, and with tremendous long distance jumping from

one building top to another going further away.

After confirming with his glance below, that the crimson avatar started to run northeast as well, Haruyuki took a deep breath, and with a rumble sound, started flying.

His two hands stuck straight in front, and charged forward while cutting the virtual air. He soon flew past the Green highway, then he went into the crossing capital number five highway and continued to accelerate.

The towering Sunshine City that he was heading for was just right ahead. Of course, that shape was not the grey colored high-rise building in the real world. Made up of bluish sharp steel trusses, and piercing through the dark clouds like a huge tower where a demon king lived. The shopping mall at its base was also changed to a desolate courtyard, the space with cracked tiles, black trees with twisted branches spread wide here and there.

There was a big set of stairs that passed through the courtyard to the tower from the street, and there he saw a blue white light filling the entrance. That was probably the «Leap Point». If he escaped there, then there won't be another chance to capture Chrome Disaster in the Unlimited Neutral Field.

That Disaster, while leaving a deep black blood trail, continued to jump in a zigzag way from one building near the highway to another. The fierce speed from not just any jump, however, it was obviously slower than Silver Crow's flight.

‘- Catching up!’

Haruyuki held his breath and calculated his rapid descent timing. First he has to knock the Armor to the ground, and then stop his movement.

While maintaining more than enough altitude, Haruyuki reached the blind spot right above the opponent, and the Armor reached the top of another building, then at the moment he jumped towards the next target, Haruyuki entered a full speed dive.

He stuck the tip of his right foot out, and descended like a sharp wedge. Maybe he heard the sound of air being cut, the Armor's helmet turned to look up. But he should not be able to dodge while in his jump path. The strongly shining tip, headed towards the back of the badly wounded armor -

“Wh... what!?”

Right before that, something improbable happened.

Chrome Disaster that was in the middle of a jump, as if seeing some kind of omen, changed his path to the right.

With a ‘Zaa’ kind of brushing sound, Haruyuki missed kicking his target. He would be buried in the building right below like that, so he controlled both wings with full strength, and barely succeeded in slowing down.

With a ‘Boom’ loud noise release, Haruyuki landed on both feet, and watched in shock as Chrome Disaster flew away to the right side.

‘What was that just now!?’ No matter what kind of long distance jump, while in the middle of a jump there is no way to change the path in the air. If that is possible, then for sure that would be the same as Haruyuki’s «flight», it could only be concluded like that.

Hastily leaving the ground again, Haruyuki chased after Disaster. Until the Leap Point at Sunshine City, there was only two or three jump’s distance left.

For an unknown reason, when the opponent can change its path in the air, he probably can no longer score a hit with a straight dive kick. If it is like that, then he would have to brave the danger of being captured, and try to attack in a close contact chase.

“...Ooo.”

With a short psyche, Haruyuki accelerated all at once, and closed in near the black silver armor’s back. Then, the Armor again made a left turn, and he unreasonably followed the turn. With the centripetal force on his whole body, his avatar creaked.

While grinding his teeth, his held fist hit towards that back, at that time. Again, Chrome Disaster showed him an unthinkable action.

This time right below, sinking almost straight down. With his punch cutting the air, Haruyuki flew past his target, and turned left while diving to aim for the opponent after it landed.

No matter what, just at the instance both feet landed on the building top, to thrust for the next jump he should stop. To the

falling Disaster's shape, with his unreasonable moves, Haruyuki desperately tried to continue capturing him in his view in the dim light, and calculated his timing.

The Armor's body became round, looked up, and extended his right arm.

And then Haruyuki saw a third startling scene.

The heavy metal avatar that should have a huge mass, rapidly decelerated in the air. With movements as if gravity was turned upside down, he momentarily stopped in the empty space, then again flew straight up. Haruyuki who again missed his target, his right foot cut through only air as he turned around - .

In his wide open eyes, he finally saw it.

Chrome Disaster who ascended in a sharp angle, and towards the somewhat high building he was heading to, between them, was a very small red line, that shone for an instant.

It's not a beam. That was a reflection from the last remaining sunlight that came in between the buildings.

It is a wire.

Inside Haruyuki's brain, from the earlier Chrome Disaster's fierce battles, the strange grip skill that he showed flashback one after another. The Yellow legion's long range avatar, and the rock that Kuroyukihime kicked up, was improbably sucked in by the Armor's open palm skill - that, also Disaster's long distance jump and mid air movement, are all the same principle. Fire from both hands, an ultra small wire with anchor attached hit the target object and sucked it back in. Or hit a stationary object and pull itself up with it.

In Haruyuki's view, Chrome Disaster who ascended with very high speed coiling of the wire, disappeared between the buildings.

While rising again to chase after him, Haruyuki desperately thought.

To interfere with that jump, all he has to do is cut the wire that was in the air.

But would he be able to cut it with his knife or kick? That heavy

looking avatar, furthermore while in descending speed was being supported easily. The hooking power of the anchor, and the wire's load carrying capacity, must be thought of as to the ultimate range. He won't be able to cut it, or on the other hand might be damaged by it.

Haruyuki who desperately turned his thinking wheel as he rapidly ascended, saw Chrome Disaster landing on the top of a building with a curved roof.

On the other side of that building is Sunshine City. Just one more jump and he will reach that tower. What should he do? How will he stop him?

Disaster extended his right hand towards the tower's blue black wall.

That sharp five fingered claw form opened. In the center, a flash of wire being fired shone.

“- That's it!!”

At that moment, Haruyuki shouted after being visited by revelation. It could be said to be a reckless tactic, but he no longer had any method other than that.

Putting all his energy into the white silver metallic fins that made up his wings, Haruyuki aimed straight for the Sunshine and went forward. The small avatar was covered by dots of light, and trailed a tail in the sky like a comet. Soon he caught up to Chrome Disaster and went past him, then over the road, and kept flying.

More - more, «accelerate» more!

With his increase in speed, the world's shape started changing. Relatively speaking, everything other than himself started to decelerate.

Haruyuki who went forward like a brilliant laser, ahead in his view, he accurately captured it. Chrome Disaster's right hand that aimed for the tower's outer wall and fired the wire. The ultra small hook at the tip of that wire.

“U... O...o!!”

With that roar and final acceleration, Haruyuki started a shallow

angle dive, with his flight trajectory aiming to cross the wire.

A ‘Kan’ kind of sound passed through his body, and he felt something ate into the center of his back.

Right after, a tremendous weight wanted to pull Haruyuki back. He resisted that, expanding all the acceleration he had, and Haruyuki continued to move forward.

That weight lessened. Chrome Disaster’s body that was behind the wire, floated in the sky behind him. Without looking behind, in Haruyuki’s brain, the Armor that was connected to him and flying at the same speed in the sky appeared.

Disaster controlled the wire’s coiling speed, so as not to crash into the thing that he hooked onto while landing. However being pulled like this, he should no longer have any skill to slow himself down.



In front of his eyes, the outer wall of the huge tower that reached for the sky closed in. While glaring at the numerous big steel beams that made up the surface of the wall, Haruyuki endured the terror and calculated timing. If he was too early, then he would give Disaster time to land, and if he was too late, he would crash into the tower as well.

‘- Here, here,’

“It is!”

With that shout, Haruyuki turned straight up to the limit of angle allowed. All the joints in his whole body creaked, and sharp pain

ran in them. One steel beam's tip lightly scratched from his chest to his stomach. While trailing orange sparks, Haruyuki rose while sticking to Sunshine's wall, and at the same time slowed down his speed.

Right after that.

With an impact sound that shook the whole Ikebukuro area, Chrome Disaster's huge body crashed into the tower's wall.

The tower itself trembled, with broken material and glass blown apart like explosions. The energy wave that was created, became blue white sparks that flew through the air.

The wire that extended from Haruyuki's back, was sucked into the huge hole on the wall around ten floors high in the tower.

With mushy quiet echos, a large amount of water spew out from that hole while Haruyuki looked on in amazement. If he concentrated on looking, he could see large and small strange sea creatures in the water as well. They danced in the air as the remaining sunlight reflected red light from their scales, and they fell to the ground floor courtyard and bounced around.

In the real world Sunshine City, that location should be the aquarium, Haruyuki realized in a daze. Probably that was also recreated in this accelerated world, and the water tank was broken by Disaster's crash.

After huge fishes and amphibians flowed out, at the end something like a lump of metal was pushed out of the huge hole, and caught by a bend steel beam.

It was Chrome Disaster. He was so broken up that his original shape no longer remained.

The right arm was half smashed to pieces, and the right foot was like crushed iron scrap. The armor was broken and crushed, with almost none of its usual shine.

From the numerous wounds, a fearsome amount of black liquid flowed out, and before they reached the ground, they dissolved in the air and disappeared. With all those, that he did not get eliminated from the field right this instant, was strange enough.

Haruyuki blinked hard once, then listened to himself saying that

this is not the time to be emotional, and prepared to lower Disaster to the ground with the wire that was still connecting them. Niko should reach that place soon.

He rose up slightly, and the wire that was pulled tight brought the Armor's right arm up.

- At that moment.

“Ruu... oooOOOOOO!!”

Suddenly, a tremendous volume roar was sent out.

Chrome Disaster raised his head, and in his hood like helmet, many long and large fangs of darkness appeared, and opened wide.

His right hand grabbed the air like a claw - and Haruyuki's body was pulled in with unspeakable force.

After falling for a few meters, Haruyuki used all his strength to move his wings, and resisted the demonic pull. The wire that was pulled tight rang with a 'Giriri' sound. Right in front of him, hungry fangs opened and closed.

“Gu... O...”

Groaning, Haruyuki desperately resisted. Chrome Disaster's «feed on prey» has damage repair function. If he got eaten up here, then that guy that healed up will again go after Niko, and also Kuroyukihime will be attacked.

Turning his eyes away from the fearsome jaw, Haruyuki looked straight up into the sky.

In the Unlimited Neutral Field sky that was getting covered by darkness of night, it was mostly filled with deep black clouds, but in between those he could see a few stars.

He extended his right hand all the way towards the biggest red star in that group. Holding his fist tight, Haruyuki also roared.

“U... O...O - .”

With a 'Douu!' vibration sound in the air, the silver wings' thrust overcame the steel thread's pull. Haruyuki who went forward as if shot out, while dangling the Armor below him, flew up with a fierce speed close to the outer wall of Sunshine. The impact wave shook

the wall like a ripple, and following behind, was glass breaking.

Haruyuki who reached the top of the tower in a few seconds, kicked a strange thorn that stuck out horizontally from its edge, and changed his body's direction on reaction.

He headed towards Chrome Disaster that was pulled flying by the wire.

“U... Raa!!”

At the same time as that shout, his right foot kicked into the Armor's throat area. With a dull metallic sound, the helmet's bottom half was blown apart, and the fangs of darkness also crumbled.

In that posture, this time he started a full speed descent. The white silver and black silver avatars became one and fell to the ground like a shooting star.

- Then.

With a ‘Boo’ sound, the darkness inside Disaster’s helmet was all blown away.

What appeared from inside, was a bright pink, simple mask.

The horizontal oval eyes dimly shone, and a small sound leaked from the mouth. With the remains of innocence, a boy’s voice.

“...I... strong... want to become. Just that...”

While continuing to dive, Haruyuki opened his eyes wide. He met the peeking like eyes, and the pink colored avatar again murmured.

“If it is you, then... you understand right? You too, power... want it right...?”

At the moment he heard those words - .

Deep in his body, Haruyuki felt an emotion with fierce heat erupting.

That was anger. Overwhelming fury.

“Want to become strong... you said?”

Haruyuki concentrated all the thrust from his wings towards the right foot on the Armor's neck, and he said that. His voice slowly changing to a shout that was sent out.

"That's why you want to say everything is forgivable!? Wearing that armor, attacking many avatars, and wanting to eat your child, Niko, you want to say all that was justified?!"

The dive already passed half of the tower. If he doesn't retreat soon, he will be in danger as well. He understood that, however Haruyuki could not stop releasing his words.

'Wanting to become strong'. Those were truly words that he repeated recently like a curse. Thinking of being inferior to everyone else, he became involved in a reckless training. But, arriving in the battle field today, and gotten past many different fighting situations, Haruyuki finally realized that he had forgotten something important.

Strength is absolutely not something relative.

Winning or losing in a duel, above or below someone, those kind of superficial reference is worthless.

It's yourself. The only absolute reference is within yourself.

"It's not just you!"

Haruyuki wrung out all his sound, and shouted.

"Niko as well... senpai too... Taku and other Burst Linkers... Chiyu, the guys in school, and teachers, everyone thinks like that!!  
Wanting to become strong, wanting to live strongly... everything painful, wanting to face with your own power, everyone thinks like that!!"

Not able to withstand the falling speed, the cracked armor fragments that broke off became points of light and disappeared. The darkness that leaked out from numerous wounds also, at the moment they touched the wall of air, were burnt up by friction.

The avatar under the helmet, no longer said anything.

Haruyuki neither decelerated nor retreated, and rushed forward with the Armor as one body.

At the center of the large stairs extending from the tower's entrance, the two avatars that were locked together crash landed with fearsome speed, and finally, it caused a huge explosion.

# Chapter 8

Although he was swallowed up by a pillar of fire that reached to the sky and violently tossed around by the impact wave, Haruyuki's HP gauge still had about 20% left, the reason for that was, he did not suffer most of the impact damage.

Crashing onto Sunshine City's big stairs, making a huge crater, Chrome Disaster's armor - enhanced armament was completely destroyed at that moment. From inside the armor that blew apart thousands of metal fragments, a high concentration of darkness particles erupted straight up, and that cushioned Haruyuki's avatar and pushed him back up into the air. After being brushed by the fragments, with a 'Butsun' sound, he felt that the wire on his back was cut.

From the huge explosion that occurred right after that, while he was tumbling inside like a broken scrap, Haruyuki desperately curled up into a ball, and endured the damage that lowered his HP gauge. Somehow he was able to escape from the super high heat area, and slowly descended while thin smoke trailed from his whole body, after landing, he could no longer stand up, and fell to his knees.

When he looked up, the orange and black fire pillar finally spread in the atmosphere, and started disappearing. Embers that fell down like rain rebounded from the grey tiles and withered trees, illuminating the area in red.

A deep bowl-shaped depression sunk into the center of the big stairs.

Right in the middle of that, half buried and lying flat, a small avatar could be seen.

The cherry pink armor was all burnt to a crisp, its left hand and right foot was missing. In the somewhat humorous oval lens, a very faint light blinked irregularly.

It was a very helpless and painful shape. That avatar was dressed in that brutal armor and went on ruthless killings, it was hard to believe.

For Haruyuki who was kneeling and could not move, he heard small footsteps closing in from behind him. His left shoulder was lightly knocked on.

“...You did it, Silver Crow. The rest... leave it to me.”

Haruyuki silently continued to watch the small back of the Red King as she stepped forward and went down the side of the crater.

He thought of standing up and following her, but soon changed his mind. Those two people's final conversation, he felt that no one should eavesdrop.

The red and similar sized avatars, one lying flat, the other standing, exchanged words for a while. Eventually, the crimson girl type avatar knelt down beside the light pink boy type avatar, and her broken left arm held up the crumbly body, and hugged him hard.

She lightly lifted up the handgun in her right hand.

And placed the muzzle on the boy's chest.

The «Judgement Blow», compared to its name, the sound and light were modest. However at the moment the virtual bullet pierced through the avatar, a phenomenon that Haruyuki had not seen till now occurred.

The boy avatar was disassembled like numerous ribbons being scattered. Those were all shining small sequences of code. All of the information that made up the duel avatar called «Cherry Rook», was released, split apart, and melted into accelerated world's sky.

About ten seconds later, there was no longer anything on Niko's arm.

The crimson avatar slowly sat down there, and looked up at the sky fully covered by dusk.

Haruyuki waveringly stood up, and dragging his fairly damaged right foot, started walking towards the bottom of the impact area. After a few seconds, he arrived behind Niko's right side and stopped, but his chest was stuck with a torrent of different emotions, that prevented words from coming out.

Eventually, Niko slowly said.

“...Cherry and I, we don’t know our parents.”

“...?”

He couldn’t understand the meaning of her words. He took a breath to ask, then the words were quietly connected.

“As for parents, I am not referring to the origin of our copies of Brain Burst. The real world’s... real parents. Previously, I mentioned my school was a boarding school. To be exact, it is an «Abandoned children total protection foster school».”

Haruyuki could only listen silently to Niko’s speech that was released while she remained sitting.

The program where newborn babies were unconditionally taken from hospitals and other places began around the start of this era. It is part of the measures to counter the accelerated declining birthrate and aging population, the program was legalized around 2030, and in many places shelters that also served as school were built. To be sure, the Nerima area that the Red legion is controlling should also have one such school.

“I have... this kind of personality, so I don’t get along with people around school... I’ve always played VR games by myself. But, three years ago... a boy two years older suddenly talked to me. ‘There is a way more fun game, do you want to try it?’ he said.”

With ‘haha’ small laughter mixed in, Niko continued.

“That kind of invitation method, it surprised me that I did something like a direct connection. But you know... that guy, with face bright red, was trying so hard with all his might that it was laughable. That side of him did not change even after I became a Burst Linker. He very seriously taught me this and that, and protected me as a shield when it got bad. But... in time, my level caught up to his... and passed him... when I noticed, I had become something like level 9. After being pushed to be a legion master, I was also frantic... I did not care about what he thought about and worried about. In reality... when we met in school, I did not even notice that he looked strange...”

Niko’s right hand scratched the ground lightly. With her head lowered, shoulders shaking, the young King wrung out a small voice.

“...That guy, wanted to always be my «parent». He wanted me to be his «child». That’s why he sought more power and lost to «Disaster Armor»’s lure. If I... I had said just one thing properly... that level didn’t matter, you are my only «parent»... that will, never, change... if I said it...”

With that, her back became rounded as she curled up, and ‘Uu Uu’ weeping leaked from Niko - .

For Haruyuki, what he needed to say was lost to him for a while.

Burst Linker’s «parent child» relationship. That weight, he who had the same bond with Kuroyukihime, should have understood. However, for Niko and Cherry Rook who did not know their real parents, that must have been the only true bond that they could make. And then right now, Niko cut that apart with her own hands. She had no other choice.

Haruyuki desperately forced what was coming up back down, and got on his knees, then put a hand on Niko’s shoulder.

“Niko. To be truthful... Brain Burst is not just any game. But... it’s not all of our reality.”

After thinking and thinking, he said that, and a very painful throat lowered his sound volume.

“I too, was always afraid of my powerlessness. Feared being abandoned by that person. But... I know that person in the real world. Face, name, and sound, I know those. That bond, no matter what happens, will not disappear. Because it’s not data. It is carved inside my heart. That’s why... that’s why, you too, in the real world, should become friends with him again. You should be able to do it... even though you and I belong to different legions in the accelerated world, in the real world, we are already friends.”

Her low crying voice continued for a while, but was eventually blown away by the dusk slight breeze and melted away.

With one final violent shake on her back, Niko wiped her eyes with her right hand, and pushed Haruyuki’s hand that was on her shoulder away.

“Friends... you said?”

The sound was raspy, and shaking, but a bit of that audacious echo

had returned. She stood up, red lens looked down at Haruyuki, and the young King let out.

“Hundred years too early! You can at best become my underling or whatever! Don’t get carried away!!”

“Wh... what.”

‘It can’t be like that’, Haruyuki wanted to continue with that, but it was overwritten by a cold echo from behind him.

“Hey, who is whose underling?”

Haruyuki turned around with a ‘Hiii!’ surprised sound, in front of his eyes was, whole body in tatters, but firmly standing deep black avatar - Black Lotus’ shape appeared.

And then, steadyng her left arm, was a blue indigo avatar, Cyan Pile.

“Se... senpai! Taku!!”

While shouting, Haruyuki jumped near those two.

“Ar-are you okay, senpai... and also Taku, how come...”

As he asked, he finally remembered. Right before they fought with the Yellow legion, Takumu himself had said it. The Burst Linker who died in this Unlimited Neutral Field, after a one hour waiting penalty, would be revived at the same place as death - which meant, somehow that much time had already passed.

“Taku... Geesh, being that unreasonable...”

With a grumble, Takumu retorted with one hand spread wide.

“Now that you mention it, Haru is also in bad shape. Chasing Chrome Disaster by yourself, there is a limit to being reckless.”

“That recklessness was from his mentor.”

After saying so, that mentor left Cyan Pile’s hand, and with one leg’s hovering movement, went to stand right in front of Niko.

While waving her right hand sword tip around, Kuroyukihime said in a somewhat arrogant voice.

“Now then, Scarlet Rain. Isn’t there something you are supposed to say to me?”

“...”

After the Red King’s right fist trembled for a while, she eventually turned her face away.

“Sorry.”

“Hey, just that?! ...That’s why, this is exactly why children...”

“Y-you too, while we battled with hardship, you were just unsightly lying there right?!”

“...What did you say?”

“What, want to fight?”

Between the two Kings face to face, giving off red and blue purple sparks, Haruyuki and Takumu desperately pushed them apart with ‘there there’.

- Then.

Suddenly, a remarkably strong wind came down from the Sunshine City huge tower, and Haruyuki involuntarily closed his eyes. Niko whispered ‘O’ sound. Continuing, Kuroyukihime said,

“There, Haruyuki-kun, look. It’s «Transition».”

“Tr... transition?”

As Haruyuki repeated what was said, he looked up and saw - .

The world’s landscape itself rapidly changing, an extraordinary scene.

The demonic city with just blue black steel and desolate ground, coming from the east direction, was covered by an aura like light veil.

Wherever that curtain touched, the street-scape that was bare cold steel material, changed to an appearance of large trees with thick trunks lined up. The trees used round openings for entrance, trunks twisted to make stairs, and thick branches suspended together to form bridges. Just like, a fairy country in a fantasy movie.

The many layers of lush leaves, faint blue phosphorescence shone in the darkness of night, lighting up what's under the forest. In front of Haruyuki who stood there in a daze, a rainbow aura came up, covering everything with rumbling sounds and passing behind him.

“Ah... S-Sunshine is...”

An instant before, the place that was the huge tower where a demon king might have lived, a huge tree that rose to the sky stood proudly there, and Haruyuki held his breath.

From the golden green moss covered trunk, it branched out and rose up, with the tree top melting into the clouds far above. From the trunk, here and there small scale forest like terrace extended, and blue light particles spill onto the ground. A majesty just like a world tree.

However, why did the field changed to this?

When he looked questioningly at her, Kuroyukihime's wounded avatar showed a smile and answered.

“Remember, when we first dived into this field, I said the attribute was «Chaos».”

“Y... yea, now that you mention it...”

“That means, this world's attribute changes with a certain period of time. However most of them are brutal looking. You are lucky, it's not often that you are shown this beautiful appearance.”

“Ah... ah.”

Haruyuki deeply breathed in the air that had also changed to a sweet smell, and nodded again and again.

There were painful and tough continuous battles, but he was glad to come to this place, he felt for the first time.

‘- I still, don't have enough power to fight here. But, eventually I will become strong enough to freely fly in this world's sky. From now on, there will be many uncool losses though... someday, for sure.’

“...I want to say, ‘Carry me again to fly around’, but. With the «Transition», Enemy will be repopped[11], so it's dangerous to loiter

around. Here, we should obediently head back.”

To Niko’s voice, Kuroyukihime also nodded.

“Let’s do that. ...Oops, before that. I almost forgot something important.”

She looked at everyone once, then continued in a stricter voice.

“...Everyone, open your status window, and check the item storage. And if the «Disaster Armor» is there... erase it completely. So the same thing won’t happen a second time.”

Haruyuki opened his eyes wide.

That’s right, they must confirm that.

Two and half years ago, after the Pure Color Seven Kings subjugated the previous generation Chrome Disaster, the Kings probably did the same thing. And then everyone there reported that the Armor did not move to them.

However that was a lie. There is no proof, but the Armor should have dropped to the Yellow King, Yellow Radio’s storage. The Yellow King hid that, and recently contacted Cherry Rook who belonged to the Red legion, and gave the Armor to him. The devilish Armor caused the no invasion treaty to be broken, to use that crime to take Niko’s head.

Like Kuroyukihime said, this tragedy should not be allowed to happen again. Haruyuki extended his right hand and touched his own HP gauge, and from status window that opened, he moved to his item storage.

That window - was completely empty. No matter how much he stared at it, there was not a single line of text.

“...Nothing.”

Looking up and answering that, next Niko said ‘Me neither’ and Takumu also ‘Me neither’ while shaking his head. Finally Kuroyukihime murmured ‘Me neither’, and the four were silent for a moment.

The fifth generation Chrome Disaster that is Cherry Rook, with Niko’s «Judgement Blow» forcefully uninstalled his Brain Burst. The

enhanced armament, when its owner lost all points, with a certain probability move to the storage of the one who defeated its owner. Then this time, it finally completely disappeared without moving - that was probably it.

Since you cannot see other's status window, there is a possibility here that someone might have hid it like the Yellow King. However.

“It disappeared, this time for sure.”

Haruyuki announced in a clear voice.

Soon Niko also confirmed.

“Yea. We are not like that Radio bastard, that guy... after fighting with Disaster, I don't think there's any idiot here who wants that for themselves. The «Disaster Armor» disappeared. We completely annihilated it.”

“Yea... That explosion, could be seen from south Ikebukuro. It's proof that it disappeared, right.”

Takumu also nodded, and finally Kuroyukihime too clearly announced.

“All right. Yellow King's confrontation will be left till next time, for now - Mission Complete. Then, let's head back and celebrate.”

“Oh, let's open a bottle of champagne.”

“Fool, children should drink juice.”

While arguing with each other, the two Kings walked out. Takumu and Haruyuki, with wry smiles, chased after them.

At the base of the world tree, there was a big opening, and inside, the blue light that he saw from the steel tower was lit. Aiming for the bright swirl that is the «Leap Point», Haruyuki who was at the back of the line, in his ears - .

He thought he heard a sound that was not a voice.

“...What?”

He involuntarily turned back, but of course no one was there.

“What's wrong, Haru?”

Hearing Takumu's voice, he hurriedly turned back, and shook his head.

"No, nothing! ...Ah, I am ten times more exhausted than a normal «Duel» somehow. I am so hungry... can't take it anymore..."

"Hey hey, let me remind you, we just ate cake in the real world a few seconds ago."

"Arg, I forgot..."

While lightly bantering with his best friend, he passed through the entrance surrounded by thick roots.

The world tree's root became a wide half ball shaped dome. In the center of that, like a mirage, floated a blue portal that sealed the real world Ikebukuro scene.

While following his three comrades and walking forward, Haruyuki looked back once more.

'...Must be my imagination.'

He whispered that in his chest, and soon turned to face forward.

However, at the moment he jumped towards the slowly turning portal, a strange sound again echoed from behind his head. That, he heard it like this.

'- Want to feed.'

# Chapter 9

Haruyuki desperately stared at the steel hole with the eight clockwise spirals.

Saturday. Afternoon 4pm.

To defend the Black legion, «Nega Nebulas»'s control of Suginami 3rd area, they were currently in the middle of an official territory battle.

The challengers were a Blue, Red, and Purple balanced trio. Those were the faces that attacked them a lot recently. Which meant they were the opponents that caused Haruyuki's unsightly piled up losses.

The one he was weakest against, was the dark red cloak sniper type avatar with the long and large anti-materiel rifle. Lying down at the roof of a building far away from the front line, tremendous powerful bullets were shot with fearsome accuracy in their direction.

Of the three people in Nega Nebulas, Kuroyukihime and Takumu are mostly close contact types, so naturally the enemy sniper opponent was left to Haruyuki who had high movement abilities. Even saying so, since Haruyuki did not have any long range attacks, he must determine the sniper's position and fly there in the flesh.

However in territory battles thus far, while he was closing in, Haruyuki was unable to avoid the enemy's shots, and was unsightly knocked down many times. For balance, Kuroyukihime had to use her high fighting ability to make it up, so during the weekend he was fiercely disgusted at himself.

And then right now, while Haruyuki was flying at full speed, he was accurately tracked by the black gun muzzle from the roof of a building one kilometer ahead.

Closing in with a straight line is the same saying 'please shoot me', so he moved as randomly as possible to escape from the enemy's scope, and once in a while hid behind obstacles on the ground. However, with some kind of skill, the large caliber rifle continued to track Haruyuki from a long distance without any delay.

‘- When will it fire. Now? Next?’

In his view while he passed by at high speed, on street buildings here and there, were shapes of the gallery. Right after his debut, being the owner of the one and only «Flight Ability», Haruyuki was very active, but methods to attack him were analyzed, so now he mostly showed them scenes where he was unsightly shot down. If the gallery was disappointed with that - it might have been better. Recently whenever he passed them, he thought about whether they were laughing at him or not, and the root of his head got hot.

Also, in the battle field behind him, while Takumu and Kuroyukihime were fighting with their close combat opponents, were they looking at him? Will he be able to take care of the sniper today, or do they have to follow up after him again, as he thought of those things.

‘- When will you shoot? Hurry and shoot. So I can be released from this heavy pressure.’

Unknowingly, for Haruyuki who went straight into the defeated mode - .

His eyes opened wide suddenly.

This is just a repeat of the previous week. Had he not learnt anything?

Of course, he did not become stronger overnight. With just a little training, he would not be suddenly able to dodge that bullet.

But, he could change his awareness at anytime.

‘I am not fighting to look cool in front of the gallery. Not to be recognized by Takumu, or be praised by Kuroyukihime.’

It’s for himself. The menial, weak, and heavyweight self that he hated, he wanted to fight so that he liked himself a little better than yesterday.

Then -

“Don’t run away!!”

He scolded himself quietly, and put strength into his two eyes again.

Don't look at the gun muzzle. That anti-materiel rifle is not the enemy.

The one who laid flat, that avatar whose finger is on the trigger. The one who moved the avatar is a Burst Linker. That brain sending out intention for shooting - feel it!

Haruyuki wrung all his concentration to look away from the gun muzzle, and stared straight at the sniper's right eye that looked through the scope.

Then, somehow he felt a slight movement from the enemy.

Right after that, an orange flash shone from far away, and a shining bullet was shot from the rifle's jaw.

Before he could determine the incoming bullet's path, Haruyuki's right wing angle changed slightly, and his body tilted. With a 'Gyan!' sound, the bullet left a shallow gouge on his right chest, and flew behind him.

1.5 seconds later, before the enemy could finish pulling the bolt handle on the rifle, Haruyuki hit his jaw with a punch.

"Oi, you managed to avoid that!"

At the moment he returned to the real world, his back was knocked on so Haruyuki jumped up from his chair.

Turning around, he saw the Burst Out one step ahead - Kuroyukihime's smiling face.

In the lounge next to Umesato middle school's cafeteria, they were at their normal table deep inside. Since it was a late Saturday afternoon, there wasn't a sign of any other students, including Takumu, as he dived from the roof.

"Ah, yes... that, probably once in a while..."

After he shrunk his head and said so, she showed him a face of relief.

"It's not once in a while. That was perfect timing. Did you see some kind of cue ahead in time?"

To Kuroyukihime who leaned her waist on the table and looked

down at him, Haruyuki mumbled ‘that, that is’ as he answered.

“Cue... if you put it that way... somehow, at the moment I looked at that guy’s scope instead of the gun muzzle, I felt like his aim shook... and dodged on reaction, something like that...”

After he mumbled that out, Kuroyukihime raised one eyebrow sharply.

“Hoo? Nn... I see, I got it... so it’s like that.”

“Wh, what do you get...?”

“No, for that sniper. No matter what, I thought that sniper’s accuracy is way too good... probably, he has an ability that can be said to be «Gaze Sensing».”

Haruyuki blinked, and asked in return.

“G, gaze sensing...?”

“Umu. That is, «Feeling the enemy’s gaze on the gun muzzle, and automatically aiming».”

“Huh!? Th... that means, up till now, I kept staring at that gun muzzle and was shot down, is that what it means...?”

“That is what it means.”

“No... no way...”

He dropped his jaw in shock, and slid down on his chair, as Kuroyukihime laughed with ‘Fufufu’.

“Don’t be so depressed. Even with that trick, you dodged that bullet with that kind of speed, it’s a tribute to your efforts. In just this one month, your reaction speed went up so much that I can see the change. You did some kind of training in secret right?”

“Ah... you knew...?”

In front of Haruyuki who cowered, Kuroyukihime crossed her black stocking covered legs, then her neat and wisdom filled beautiful face showed a smile.

“Of course. I am your «parent». What kind of training did you do?”

“Th... that is, well...”

Haruyuki explained the training room that he made from his idea.

Then.

With a ‘Gochin!’ sound, his head was knocked on, and a scream came from Haruyuki.

“Higii!?”

“A... ar, are you an idiot!? From that close range, trying to dodge a handgun bullet with no gunman!? And furthermore with pain sensation set to maximum!?”

Kuroyukihime who shouted with a blazing expression, for a while her right fist shook, but - .

She saw Haruyuki with tears frozen in both eyes, and she blew out a long breath, then suddenly hugged his head with both hands.

“Wa, waa!? Se, senpai, wh, wha...”

When he almost fainted from the feeling the softness through the school uniform, a changed and calm voice echoed from above his head.

“...I told you right? No matter what happens, our relationship, nothing will be harmed. Believe it. This is an order.”

“...Y, yes.”

Seeing Haruyuki relax and nod, Kuroyukihime left his head and smiled.

“I will tell you now, the reason for accepting the Red King’s request this time was, to convey to you that winning and losing is not everything, I also thought of it like that. That’s why, don’t be too unreasonable. Become stronger bit by bit... that way, I will be happy too. Then, it’s about time to go home.”

Haruyuki looked at Kuroyukihime who stood up and took her school bag from the table, then gave another deep nod.

And then he could not make a sound, so murmured only in his mouth.

“Me too... Me too, no matter what happens... I won’t hurt you a second time.”

“Nn? Did you say something?”

To Kuroyukihime who turned around while her long hair swayed, Haruyuki hurriedly shook his head.

“N... no, nothing!”

Then he stood up from his chair, and quickly chased after his parent that’s a King, and also upperclassman and beloved person.

After he opened his apartment home door, the air that still had a bit of sweet smell covered Haruyuki.

The dim hall that returned only silence, was a familiar scene, but it gave him a bit of loneliness. The two Kings staying overnight was just for two nights, but that experience will not be forgotten for a long time.

“...I am home.”

He murmured that and took off his shoes, then Haruyuki continued to the empty living room and opened the door.

His mother should have returned this morning from her overseas trip, but somehow she left only her suitcase and soon went to work. That is unbelievable vitality.

After he removed his uniform coat, and placed it with his necktie on the back of a chair, it was then that Haruyuki noticed the blinking icon in his view. Just like that time, his mother left him a message in the home server.

While taking a bottle of Oolong tea from the refrigerator, he played the message with his voice command. A slight noise touched his hearing, then his mother’s flesh voice continued.

[ - Haruyuki, today I will be late, or might not return home. The clothes in the suitcase, please take them out for cleaning. Ah, also, sorry but we are again asked to take care of a child. This time is a colleague’s child, it’s just for one night so please take care of it. When Haruyuki comes home, that child should be there already. Then, yoroshiku.]

‘- What was that?’

While tilting the Oolong tea glass, Haruyuki froze.

‘No way. It must be a lie. No matter how you put it.’

He took one drink, then left the glass. While holding his breath, he looked around.

The living room and kitchen was completely empty. The lights were off, and the air was quiet. With Haruyuki’s desperate cleaning last night, the retro game tournament’s disaster from the day before yesterday was all gone without a trace.

While he held his breath, and look around again, in Haruyuki’s ears - .

From somewhere, a slight, however for certain, he heard a cackling sound.

“...Kidding, must be...”

While groaning, he flew out of the living room with lightning speed, dashed in the hall, and pushed open the door to his room that was ahead.

And then, Haruyuki took a deep breath, and screamed.

“Gyaaa - !!”

On top of his bed.

Lying flat, with crossed legs, on top of a mountain of previous era paper comic pulled from his secret storage area, flipping one book, was a bright red girl.

“Ni... ni, nini...”

Taking a glance at the trembling Haruyuki, the girl lifted her head with the pigtails on either side swaying, and said in a smile.

“Welcome home, onii-chan.”

“Wh, who!!”

With that scream, Haruyuki collapsed where he was, the girl - «Immobile Fortress», «Bloody Storm», the Red King, Scarlet Rain

that is Kouduki Yuniko, he pointed at her as his mouth opened and closed, then finally managed say one line.

“...Niko. How did you get here?”

“Don’t make me explain the same thing again. Just a little fake email.”

Sudden returning to her normal tone of voice, Niko lifted her upper body. The comic book - not an educational one, the one filled with dead people - she waved that around and snickered.

“You, also have nice interest here as well.”

“Wh... why thank you. ...Not that!!”

While breathing heavily with ‘haahaa’ sounds, Haruyuki shook his head that lost strength left and right.

“...No matter what, isn’t this unreasonable? Just one day after using the same kind of social engineering, why...”

“Say what. I was thinking of coming here to say thank you.”

To Niko whose lips became pointed, he hurriedly showed a nod.

“Th, that courtesy, thanks.”

If she became upset again, and «Duel» him today, this time for certain he would be roasted by that super firepower. While showing a stiff smile, Haruyuki quickly said.

“You are welcome. ...That business, is done right? For your return, you can use that door...”

“Ah, that kind of attitude huh. Hmm. I was going to report after the fact, forget it.”

“H, hear it, I will hear it!”

She looked down at Haruyuki who sat down properly, sat cross-legged with her slender legs extending from the cut jeans, then Niko gave him an once over, but fortunately she continued her words.

“...About the incident with Chrome Disaster.”

Haruyuki swallowed a small breath, and changed his mind’s gear.

This is information that he must report to Kuroyukihime later.

“...Last night, I reported the execution of Disaster to the other five Kings including that Radio guy. For now, that incident is taken care of. For me, Yellow hiding the «Armor» is still a problem. Unfortunately we don’t have proof...”

“...I see...”

Haruyuki slowly nodded. Continuing, he fearfully asked.

“And then... That, «Cherry Rook»...?”

“...”

Niko was silent for a while, as she looked up at the evening sky through the south window.

The red brown eyes narrowed, and she winkled her long eyebrows once, then quietly answered.

“That guy, will be moving away next month.”

“What...?”

“A distant relative, offered to take him in so late at this time. Our school’s expenses are all covered by taxes, so they cannot reject that kind of offer for students. The place he is moving to... is Fukuoka.”

“...I see. That is far away.”

“Well, yea. That was why he was so impatient. Once he moves away, his bond with me, will become just Brain Burst. Furthermore, there are almost no Burst Linkers outside Tokyo. Not being able to duel means he won’t level up... with that impatience, he was eaten by the «Armor»...”

Showing a drinking something gesture, Niko smiled slightly.

“But, maybe because he lost Brain Burst... today that guy, had his original... the face that he showed me when he first talked to me. Recently he did not go to classes, and did not talk to anyone, but today he talked to me properly. So then... I, thought. Even if he is not a Burst Linker... and he moved to Fukuoka. VR worlds, is not limited to the accelerated world, right?”

Haruyuki looked at her, and made a big nod.

“Y... yea, of course that is right.”

“That’s why, I, had never thought about it till now though... think that I should play some other VR game. Together with that guy, something that you can play for a long time. If you, know of something good, tell me.”

“...I see. I see...”

Again, this time he repeatedly nodded, then Haruyuki answered.

“Then, what I have at home, you can take anything. ...The genre is a bit deviated though.”



“Hahaha.”

Niko laughed, and suddenly turned around, searching in the small rucksack that was beside her.

What she pulled out, was a brown paper bag. She lightly threw that, and Haruyuki hurriedly caught it in both hands.

“Wh, what?”

“Well... somehow, that is.. the thank you. You, at that time, ate while saying ‘delicious delicious’ right.”

While tilting his head, he opened the paper bag, and a light sweet butter scent whiffed up. Covered with white kitchen paper, the face of a few golden disks looked up.

While dumbfounded, Haruyuki took out a still slightly warm cookie, and fearfully asked Niko.

“Err... th, this, can I really have it...?”

“Say what. Give it back if you don’t want it!”

After being glared at, he hurriedly shook his head.

“Want, I want! Th... thank you. I was a little surprised...”

He lowered his head and bit into the cookie in his hand.

Sweet, fragrant, and a bit salty taste.

Reality’s taste, he thought. This taste is a symbol of something in reality.

That something is - ‘Niko and I, right now without a doubt became friends in the real world’, that is what it means.

“...Ugu.”

From Haruyuki’s throat, a strange sound leaked out.

Shrinking his round body as much as possible, desperately hiding his face, Haruyuki took another bite of the cookie. At that moment, he heard a high shriek coming from above the bed.

“Y... y, you, why are you crying! Ar, are you an idiot, you can just

die!!”

While Niko who was face down on the bed, as he listened to her continually shouting ‘idiot idiot’, Haruyuki continued to eat the cookies that became slightly saltier.

(END)

# Author's Notes

Long time no see, or it could be nice to meet you for the first time, I am Kawahara Reki. Thank you very much for reading “Accel World 2 Crimson Storm Princess”.

Regarding the previous volume’s Author’s Notes, from different directions came “Too stiff!” “Pretentious!” “Who?” and others being said about 200 million times, so this time I think that I will sent it out softer.

Twice a week, I rode my old bicycle from my home to near Kawazoi, around 35km north, the ranch there. In that ranch, two kittens were born last year. At first they were so cute, but they really grew up at a tremendous speed (laugh). They became big in no time, and being big is fine, but the problem is when I was eating sweet buns as supplement food on the bench at the ranch, they came flying at fierce speed, and begged for the buns with ‘Nya-Nya-’ cries.

I feel that it’s not too good idea to feed buns to cats, and above all I would like to avoid having my precious calories stolen, so I came up with a plan to give up a bit of dried sardines to them instead of my sweet buns. What a kind person I am! You can get charmed!

However. The dried sardines (domestic ones too) that I held out with full confidence, the cats only sniffed it then ignored it. And then seem to say, ‘Who would eat something like fish, give that bun, give that bun’ in a commotion. I was shocked, do you understand how I felt? At that time I believed that animals like cats are born with a DNA that has “Dried Sardine Love” recorded on it. However it was not like that. Cats that grew up without eating fish, became disliking fish.

The result, right now about 10% of my precious sweet buns were taken by them as the days go by.

The lesson from this no matter story is, “Thinking that someone will be happy to receive, does not mean that they will really be happy to receive”, is what it ended up. Err... even so, the book that I worked hard in my way to write, I pray that it will make everyone happy.

Illustrator HIMA-san, editor Miki-san, this time as well were of great assistance.

For me who felt dejected, the friends in IRC channel who gave me encouragement, and everyone that sent support messages on my site, thank you very much.

And then for you who read till this point, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

2009 March 30th, Kawahara Reki

# References

1. ↑ pervert, etc, I like the Japanese version.
2. ↑ central railway line in Tokyo
3. ↑ resident registration network
4. ↑ Nice to meet you, Take care of me, or similar greeting. But here it might be a bit sarcastic.
5. ↑ Italian ice cream
6. ↑ uncle, Mr. or related term a young person call an older male
7. ↑ 環七 - I checked google maps and found out this is the 7th circular road that surrounds center of Tokyo. The one beyond it is call 環八 - Eight Ring by the way. I can't seem to find Ring One to Six though.
8. ↑ Japan Railways
9. ↑ Easter island stone statues.
10. ↑ Female demon mask used in Noh theater.
11. ↑ MMO term, means reappear sometime after death.

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